S.H.
R.T.

LEST WE FORGET

Escapes and Attempted Escapes from Jersey during the German Occupation

1940–1945

Roy Thomas

To: Sir John Sutton.

With Best Wishes.

Roy Thomas

La Haule Books – Jersey

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* Many of the photographs reproduced in this book were taken nearly 50 years ago, and, in consequence do not attain today's standard of quality and finish.

Acknowledgements

My grateful thanks are due to all the active participants featured in this book who have contributed so kindly and enthusiastically throughout, in a number of cases by making available their personal diaries and notes made all those years ago, which bear the unmistakable mark of authenticity.

I was greatly helped by constant reference to the late Leslie Sinel's Occupation Diary and numerous articles that have appeared in the Jersey Evening Post over the years.

I would also like to acknowledge the assistance afforded to me by Michael Ginns from the Channel Islands Occupation Society (Jersey Branch), who permitted me to use material from two excellent articles by the late Margaret Ginns.

Thanks are also due to Joe Mière, Curator of the German Underground Hospital, St Peter, not only for his enthusiastic interest and help in this project, but also for making available numerous photographs to supplement those supplied by individuals, and to Clive Coutanche of Professional Colour Services for processing many of these old prints ready for publication.

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Finally, I am indebted to Sir Robert Le Masurier DSC for kindly writing the Foreword.

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Foreword
by
Sir Robert H. Le Masurier D.S.C.
Bailiff of Jersey 1962 – 1974.

When Mr. Thomas paid me the compliment of asking me to write a foreword to his account of the escapes made from the Island during the German Occupation, I asked if I might first read what he had written, and, having done so, I gladly agreed to do as he asked.

The work is aptly entitled "Lest we Forget", and must have involved much industrious research, and, furthermore, is very well written.

It makes a valuable contribution to the history of the Occupation and pays tribute to the skill, determination, and courage, not only of those who escaped and attempted to escape but unhappily failed, but also to all those who aided and abetted the escapers.

The hazards were enormous, as was pointed out by Dr. Charles Cruickshank in his book 'The German Occupation of the Channel Islands'. He wrote..."Escapers were compelled to use the smallest of boats and to navigate some of the most dangerous waters in the world...". Furthermore, there were no cities or Maquis in the Island in which plans and preparations could be made in comparative security. In Jersey, garrisoned as it was, the risk of discovery was very high, particularly as informers were not lacking.

Finally, the attitude of the German authorities to anyone attempting to escape was made very clear. Mr. Leslie Sinel in his *Diary* noted that on 9 May 1942 the Germans had issued a warning to the inhabitants against further attempts to leave the Island and threatened severe penalties.

Mr. Thomas is to be congratulated on his work.

Historical Note

The Channel Islands have belonged to the Duke of Normandy since 933 AD, and the Islands have remained steadfastly loyal to the British Crown throughout the centuries.

The four main Channel Islands – Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney and Sark – are situated in the Bay of Mont St Michael to the west of the Cherbourg peninsular; Jersey, the largest island, is a rough oblong in shape with an area of some 45 square miles; England is 90 miles to the north, Normandy is some 14 miles to the east, and Brittany 30 miles to the south.

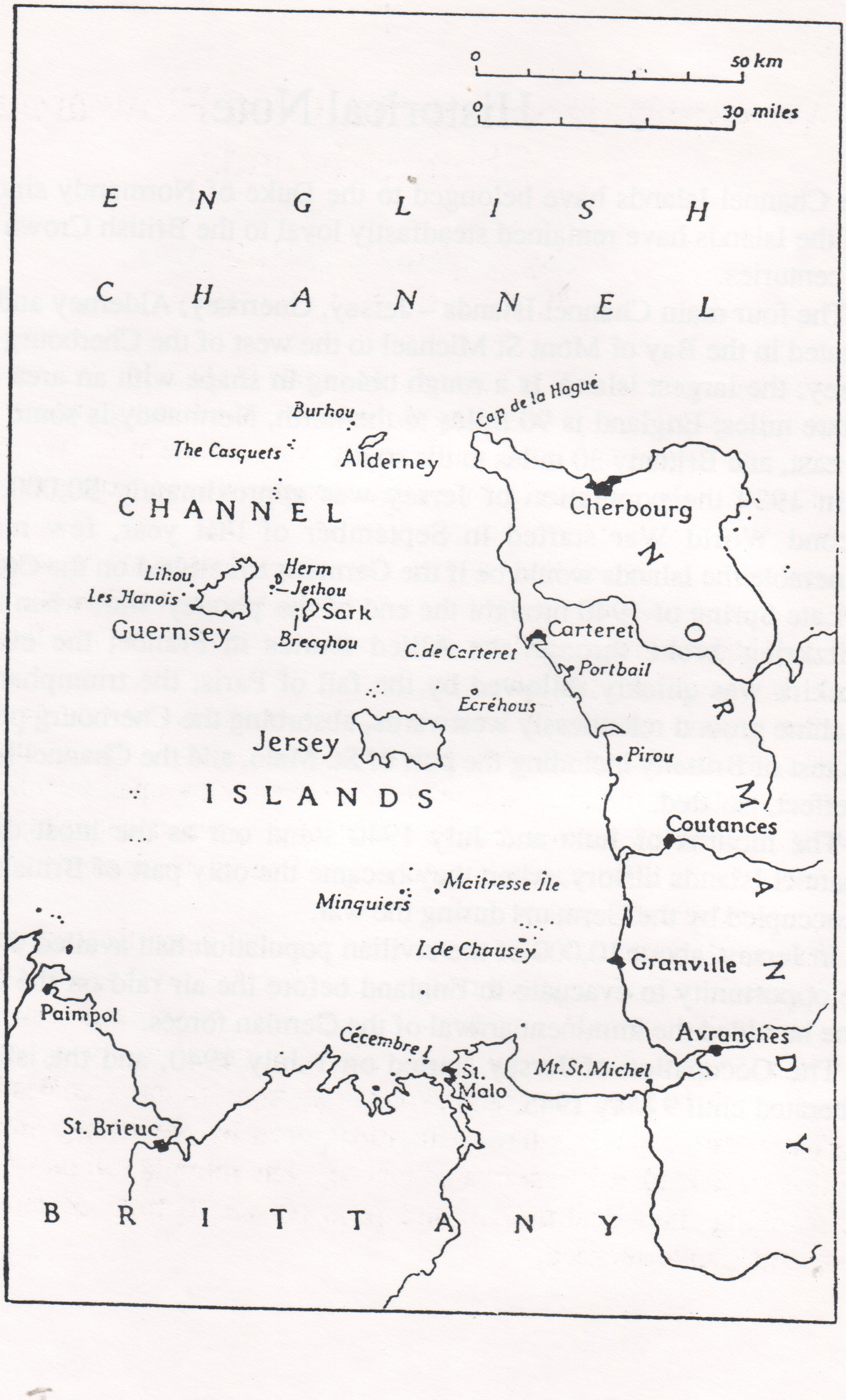
In 1939 the population of Jersey was approximately 50,000. When the Second World War started in September of that year, few realised how vulnerable the Islands would be if the Germans triumphed on the Continent.

Late Spring of 1940 brought the end of the 'phoney' war, when the German 'Blitzkrieg' broke through the Allied armies in France; the evacuation of Dunkirk was quickly followed by the fall of Paris; the triumphant Nazi war machine ground relentlessly westwards, absorbing the Cherbourg peninsula and the rest of Brittany including the port of St. Malo, and the Channel Islands were, in effect, isolated.

The months of June and July 1940 stand out as the most disastrous in Channel Islands history, when they became the only part of British territory to be occupied by the Germans during the war.

In Jersey, about 10,000 of the civilian population had availed themselves of the opportunity to evacuate to England before the air raid on the island on 28 June heralded the imminent arrival of the German forces.

The Occupation of Jersey started on 1 July 1940, and the island was not Liberated until 9 May 1945.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Sark
Guernsey
Brecqhou
Carteret
C. de Carteret
Portbail
Ecréhous
Jersey
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Minquiers
I. de Chausey
Granville
Paimpol
Cécembre I.
Avranches
St. Malo
Mt. St. Michel
St. Brieuc
B R I T T A N Y
N O R M A N D Y

The Channel Islands

An Appreciation of the Tidal Flow around the Channel Islands

by Captain Roy Bullen,
Harbourmaster of Jersey.

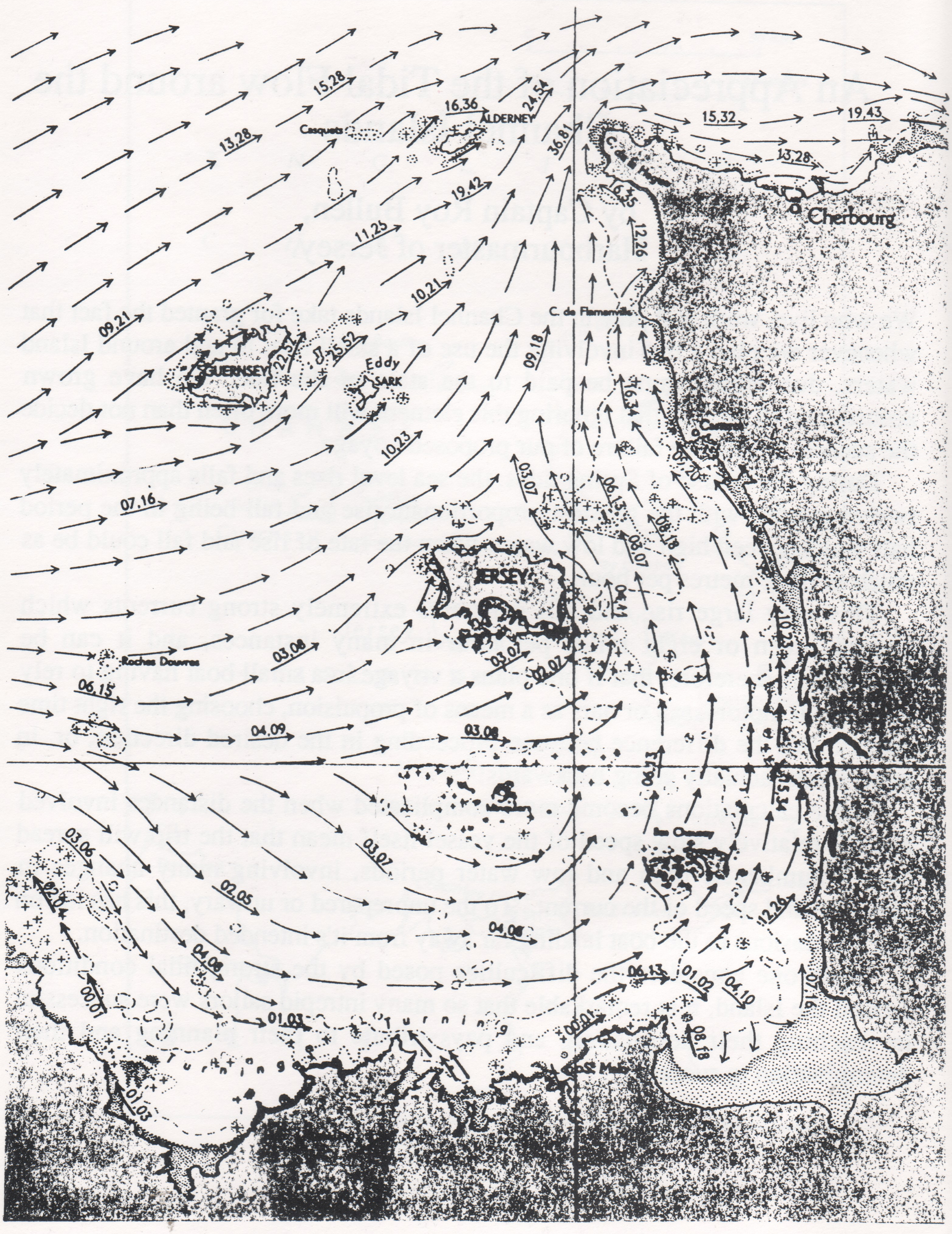
We who live, work and play in the Channel Islands take for granted the fact that whenever we plan a trip involving the use of a small boat in and around Island waters, due regard must be paid to the state of the tide. We have grown accustomed to the fact that ignoring this element will more often than not decide the success or relative failure of our proposed voyage.

During the course of Spring tides, the sea level rises and falls approximately twelve metres, with the greatest proportionate rise and fall being in the period half way between high and low water, when the rate of rise and fall could be as much as three metres per hour.

This very large rise and fall generates extremely strong currents which exceed seven or eight miles per hour in many instances, and it can be appreciated, therefore, that if one plans a voyage in a small boat having to rely upon small motors, sail or oars as a means of propulsion, choosing the right time could make the difference between proceeding in the desired direction, or, in many cases, actually going backwards!

These calculations become more complicated when the distances involved and the relatively slow speed of the vessel itself mean that the trip will spread over a number of high and low water periods, involving many changes in direction and speed of the current. To the unprepared or unwary, this has led on many occasions to the boat landing far away from it's intended destination.

When one considers the difficulties posed by the strong tidal conditions around the Island, it is remarkable that so many intrepid sailors were successful in reaching their destination, and pays tribute to their planning and their determination to succeed.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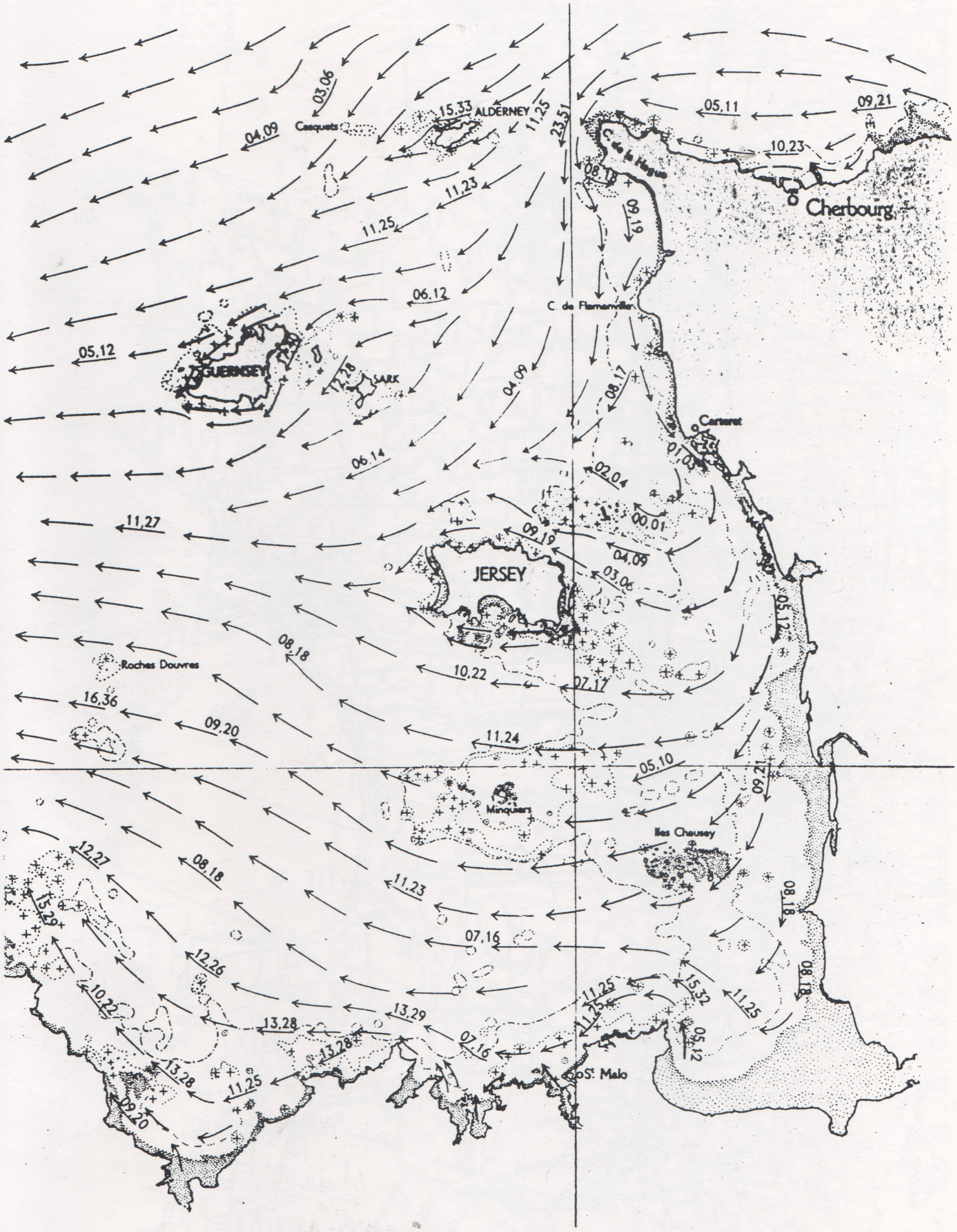
The tidal flow at high water at St. Helier, Jersey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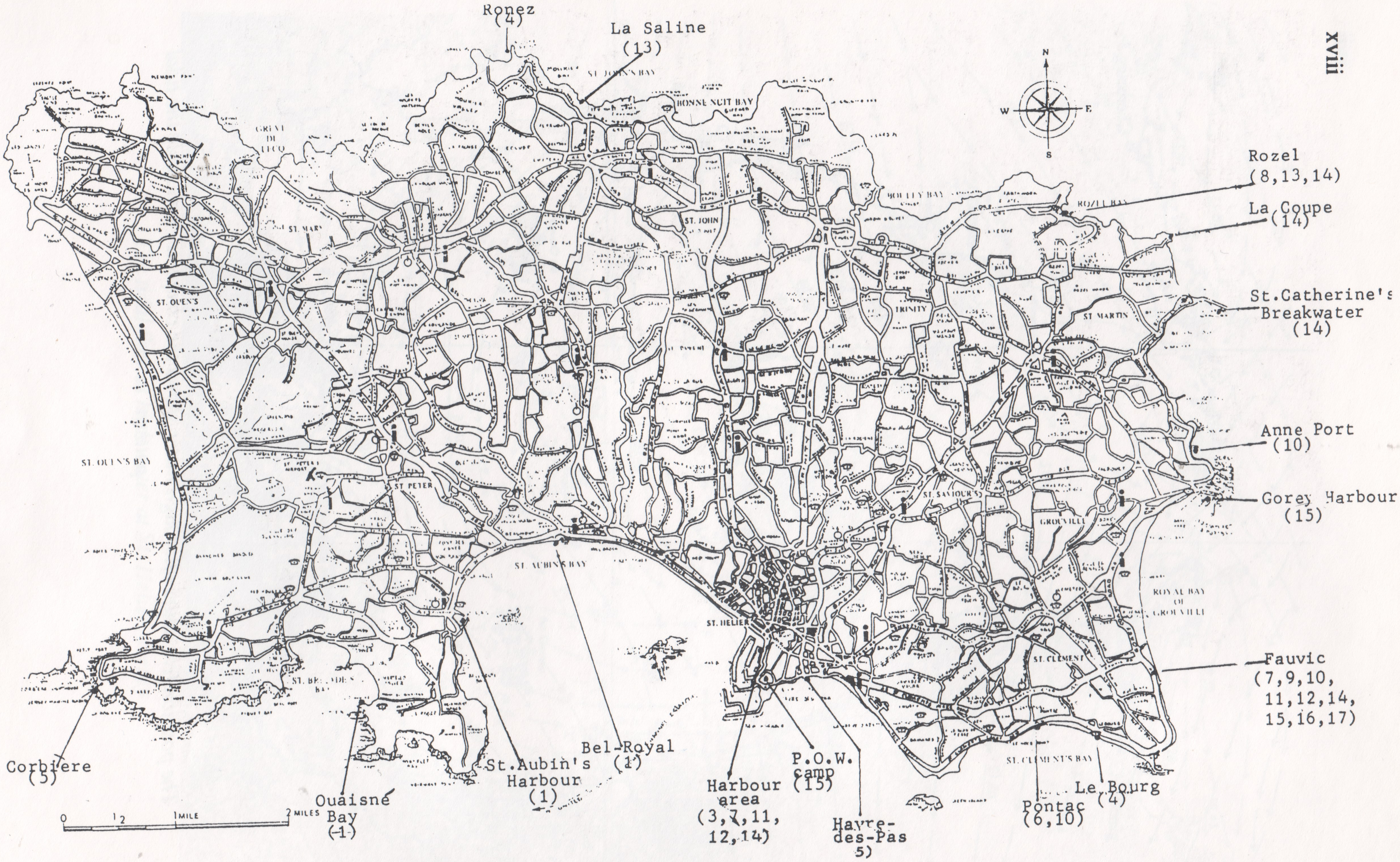
The position five hours after high water shows the complete reversal of the tidal pattern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ST. AUBIN'S BAY
ST. HELIER
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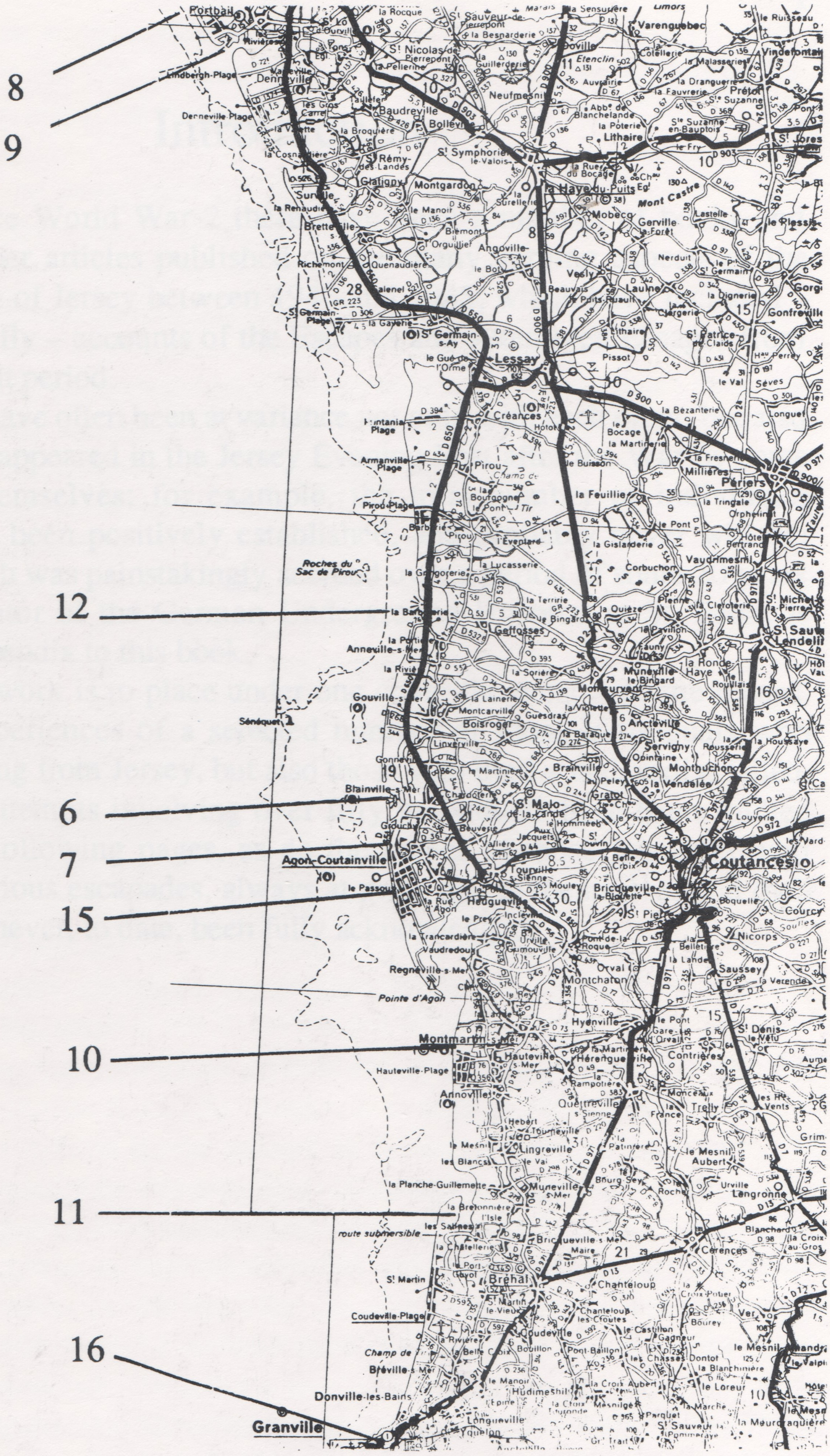
ST. BRELADE'S BAY

Map of Jersey showing the main areas mentioned in the book by chapter number.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Créances
Pirou-Plage
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Anneville-s-Mer
Gouville-s-Mer
Blainville-s-Mer
Agon-Coutainville
Coutances
Pointe d'Agon
Regnéville-s-Mer
Montmartin-s-Mer
Hauteville-Plage
Annoville
La Haye-du-Puits
Périers
Bréhal
Coudeville-Plage
Donville-les-Bains
Granville
route submersible

Probable landing areas of escapees on the Cotentin Peninsula

Introduction

Over the years since World War 2 there have been a number of books and occasional newspaper articles published on the many varying aspects of the German Occupation of Jersey between 1940 and 1945, which have included – often only very briefly – accounts of the Escapes and Attempted Escapes from the Island during that period.

These accounts have often been at variance not only with each other, but also with articles which appeared in the Jersey Evening Post after the War by some of the escapees themselves; for example, the total number of individuals involved has never been positively established, and probably never will be; however, a list which was painstakingly accrued over a period of some 20 years by Joe Mière, Curator of the German Underground Hospital at St. Peter, is published as an Appendix to this book.

The aim of this work is to place under one cover the most accurate record, not only of the experiences of a selected number of those individuals who succeeded in escaping from Jersey, but also those who tried – and, sadly, failed. Eighteen separate attempts involving over fifty individuals have been studied and appear in the following pages, as do the names of those Islanders who assisted in these various escapades, always at great risk to themselves and their families, who have never, to date, been fully acknowledged.

CHAPTER 1

"Going Solo"

DENIS VIBERT – 21 SEPTEMBER 1941

One of the most daring escapes from Jersey during the five years of German Occupation was that made by Denis Vibert in September 1941.

It was unique in many ways, not only because it was the only recorded solo escape from Jersey to England, but also because it was made during the relatively early days of the Occupation when the Lüftwaffe, though beaten in the Battle of Britain a year before, was still a force to be reckoned with, as German aircraft were constantly above the skies of the Channel Islands, and the seas around were subject to continual patrols by E-Boats of the Kriegsmarine.

Jersey born Denis Vibert entered Victoria College Jersey in 1930, leaving four years later, at the age of 15, for training in the Merchant Navy Training Ship *Worcester*; this marine training, which included much practice in rowing, together with the experience gained during a spell spent at sea with the Blue Funnel line, was to serve him in good stead some years later. He returned to Jersey in 1937 and began farming at Val de la Mare, St. Ouen.

Soon after the outbreak of World War Two he left the Island with the intention of joining the Armed Forces; unfortunately, his return to Jersey to settle his affairs coincided with the arrival of the German Occupation Forces in July 1940.

The first attempt.

He was determined not to remain in Jersey, and immediately started planning his escape. It may not be generally known that two attempts were made, the first being in November 1940, two months before his 22nd birthday. He planned to use his own 9ft row-boat, the *Tiny*, which he had owned for many years, and in which, at the age of 14 he had rowed to the Ecréhous Reef off the north east coast of the Island. The boat was kept in St. Aubin's harbour which was free of German sentries at the time, and Denis planned to slip away quietly and to row all night to a group of rocks called the Roches Douvres located some 20 miles south of Guernsey, where he intended to hide up during daylight and continue his journey the following night.

The first part of the venture was successful and he duly reached the rocks; unfortunately, the next day the wind changed and he was unable to continue his journey the following night; he waited four days, trying to subsist on a diet of limpets and rainwater.

During this time, he developed influenza, the weather conditions did not improve, and he finally decided to abandon the attempt and return to Jersey. The return was not uneventful as, on approaching the south-west of the Island, the *Tiny* was wrecked after striking rocks south-east of Ouaisné Bay near La Cotte cave, forcing Denis to swim the last few hundred yards to the shore.

Miraculously, he not only landed undetected, but also he found that his absence from the Island had not been discovered by the Germans. He returned to his father's house, Spring Grove, Bel Royal, which was occupied by a Mr. William Le Brun, the Southern & Great Western Railway Agent, while Mr Vibert Snr. was away in England.

Second time lucky.

Four days on the Roche Douvres, suffering for much of the time with 'flu, in danger of being discovered by a prowling Nazi plane or 'E' Boat, followed by a swim in winter-cold weather, would have daunted most people, but not young Denis Vibert; he immediately set to work planning another, determined to make this second attempt as foolproof as possible.

On 24 April 1941 the Germans issued an Order that – by a certain deadline date – all Boats on shore, in garages, private houses, etc, were to be taken to the harbours of either St. Helier, St. Aubin or Gorey, in order to have them under control. It was necessary, therefore, for Denis to obtain one as soon as possible in order to beat the deadline.

He managed to purchase for £5.an 8ft boat called the *Ragamuffin* from a Mr. Smith who lived at Robin Hood, St. Helier, and also to obtain two outboard motors, which were hidden in the garage at Spring Grove. He set to work making the boat thoroughly sea-worthy, including increasing the height by another strake, which involved bending two planks of wood to the shape using steam from a kettle; he also painted the whole of the boat grey, to provide a camouflage against observation from the air. Denis also spent hours poring over charts, testing and fitting a compass to the floor of the boat and planning out what stores he would take with him.

All these preparations took some months, including obtaining petrol syphoned from a German lorry, and it wasn't until mid-September 1941 that he decided to make his attempt.

Some time before, he had hired a small garage on the sea-side of the main road between Bel Royal and Beaumont, (an area in St. Aubin's Bay on the south coast of the Island), into which he stored a farm tractor. Children were in the habit of playing near the garage, so Vibert approached them, saying he was trying to conceal the tractor from the Germans to prevent it being requisitioned, and bribed the youngsters not to play in the area of the garage as it might lead the Germans there; the children entered into the spirit of the 'game' and kept well clear.

One person who assisted him greatly in this preparation period was John Moignard, of Bel Royal Garage. He prepared and tested the two outboard motors which Vibert had taken to him and was also instrumental in arranging the transport of the boat from Spring Grove to the garage.

On the appointed day of departure – Tuesday 21 September – Moignard obtained a lorry, loaded the boat and equipment, camouflaged with potato barrels, and moved, in broad daylight to the garage, the tractor having first been removed.

At that time, the Germans were in the process of building a sea-wall along that part of St. Aubin's Bay, but, remarkably, they took no notice of the activity around the garage.

That evening, Moignard and his work-mate, Cyril Quérée, helped Denis to move the boat and equipment out of the garage and on to the beach. This was no easy task, apart from the sheer physical effort, every now and again there was the sound of German boots walking along the road nearby, which meant they had to pause and keep very quiet until the coast was clear; all the time they expected that someone from houses nearby might come out to see what was going on, or, worse, that a German patrol might be alerted. Luckily, they succeeded in getting the boat on to the beach, negotiating soft sand, and, finally, after wading up to their knees in the sea, Moignard and Quérée managed to push Denis's boat off, before they themselves faded away into the night; the time was approximately 9 p.m.

Denis rowed out to sea on muffled row-locks; the weather was good at the start, but the first bit of bad luck occurred soon after leaving the shore, when two German E-Boats passed 100 yards or so away and, although the boat was not spotted, their back-wash half-filled the small boat, rendering Denis's small stock of food uneatable.

He rowed some 4 miles out to sea before making use of the outboard motor; by daybreak, using the ebb-tide, he was about 15 miles West of Guernsey; he then set course for Start Point, Devon.

At this stage, the sea was rather choppy, and, in attempting to refuel, sea-water got into the engine, rendering it unserviceable; in attempting to fit the spare engine, misfortune struck again, when it slipped overboard into the sea.

There was nothing left now but to row, as the boat, though having a small sail, had no keel, and the wind at that time was unfavourable. Denis then rowed for the next two days and nights, without food and water, sleeping for part of the nights while the boat drifted with the tide.

Late on the Thursday, fearing that the tidal flow might take him too far west, Denis decided to alter course and head on a more easterly bearing; he discovered later that, had he not made this change of course, he would probably have reached Start Point as planned originally.

On the Friday afternoon he sighted Portland Bill but, as it was getting late in the day and he was being taken eastward by a strong tide and favourable wind, which enabled him to raise his small sail, he planned to drift all night and try to make a landfall at Weymouth in daylight the following day.

At about this time, a British Mine-sweeper went by but did not stop – later it was revealed that it was unable to stop because it was towing its mine-sweeping gear.

At this point of the story, one turns to Lieutenant Commander F. Troughton RNR (Retd) who, as a 21 year old Leading Seaman at that time, was serving on a Hunter Class Destroyer, HMS *Brocklesby*, which was sailing up-Channel on convoy duty about 10 miles from Portland Bill.

"On that September evening (Friday 24th), I was on watch in the Ship's Director Control Tower above the bridge; I was the Ship's Rangetaker. During the last Dog Watch (1800-2000), in the late evening sun, I spotted a small boat with a tiny sail a couple of miles away. I reported this to the bridge, and the Captain altered course to investigate; I remember the Skipper asking over the loud hailer 'Where are you from?'; when the lonely occupant shouted 'From Jersey, Channel Islands – trying to make Portland', our Captain replied 'You'd better come aboard'..

Denis picked up his oars and tried, unsuccessfully, to reach the destroyer, so HMS *Brocklesby* came alongside, falls were dropped down the ship's side, a sailor slid down them, made fast, and boat, sailor, and the exhausted occupant were all hoisted on to the ship's deck; later it was calculated that *Ragamuffin* had covered a distance of about 150 miles.

Denis received medical attention to his hands and buttocks, which were severely blistered and chafed; he was fed and put to bed in a cozy cabin, where he slept and recovered from his ordeal. He was landed, together with his boat, at

Dartmouth a couple of days later, after the destroyer had completed its convoy duty.

He was met by Army Police, handed over to Naval Intelligence at Plymouth for questioning, and then taken to London for further interrogation by M.I.5, who wanted to establish that he was not a German agent; fortunately, a fellow-Jerseyman, Commander Denys Richardson RN, was on hand to vouch for him. He was also questioned about the German Forces in Jersey – fortifications, troop and air activity etc., following which he was free to join his parents who were living in Aldermaston, Berks, and who had left Jersey just ahead of the Germans in June 1940.

Denis returned to Dartmouth to claim *Ragamuffin* which had been handed over by the Army to the authority of the Customs; the latter asked him how much he though the boat was worth, and he replied that he had paid £5 for it. The upshot was that, as he had 'imported' the boat into England, he would be charged 10/- (50 pence) Import Duty! The Duty was duly paid, and the boat was put on a train to Aldermaston, where it remained until the end of the War.

It was eventually brought back to Jersey where, today, it can be seen in the grounds of the Société Jersiaise property at La Hougue Bie, St. Saviour.

Denis promptly volunteered for service in the Royal Air Force, went to Canada for aircrew training, and on his return to the United Kingdom, flew Wellingtons in Coastal Command, until he was invalided out of the Service through ill health.

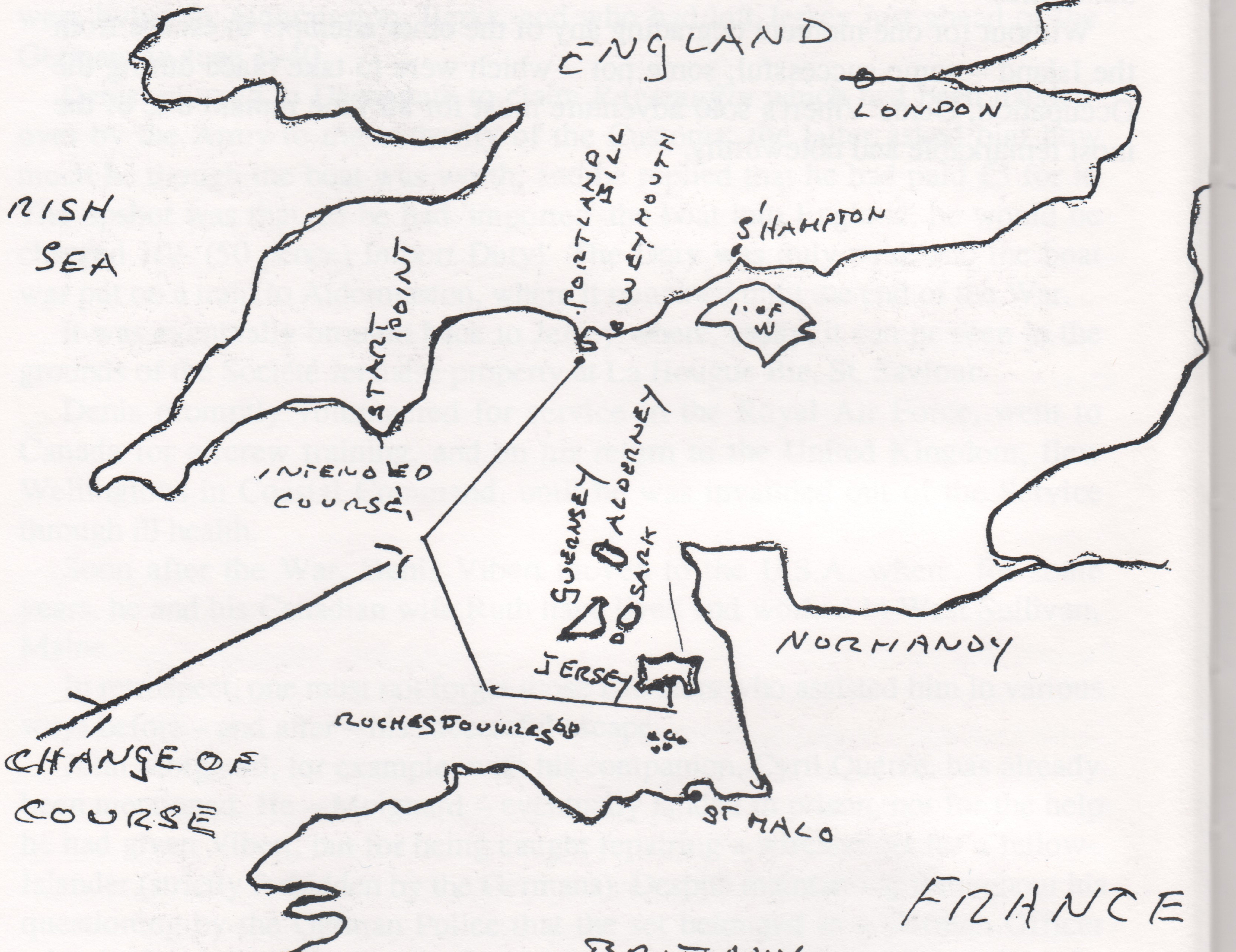
Soon after the War, Denis Vibert moved to the U.S.A. where, for some years, he and his Canadian wife Ruth have lived and worked in West Sullivan, Maine.

In retrospect, one must not forget those Islanders who assisted him in various ways before – and after – his successful escape.

John Moignard, for example, with his companion, Cyril Quérée, has already been mentioned. He – Moignard – eventually landed in prison, not for the help he had given Vibert, but for being caught repairing a wireless set for a fellow-Islander (strictly forbidden by the Germans). Despite maintaining throughout his questioning by the German Police that the set belonged to a German Officer who had never collected it from him, he was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment, which he served at Troyes, France; apart from the shortage of food in the prison, he said later that he had not been badly treated, and was back in Jersey again by December 1943.

Among other 'locals' who helped were Mr. and Mrs. William Sarre of 'Clifton', St. Lawrence, with whom Denis had been living prior to his escape, Mr. William Le Brun, and K. Duquemin of Devonshire Place, St. Helier. The latter collected all the gear that had been left behind at the garage, and brought it piece-meal into St. Helier, and got rid of it in various ways. Both Messrs. Sarre and Le Brun were closely questioned by the German Police, together with a number of residents in the Bel Royal and First Tower areas of the Island, in a vain attempt to trace how Denis Vibert had managed to get away, and who had helped him, and the fact that all the interrogations led to naught stands for all time to the credit of those subjected to the investigations by the German authorities.

Without for one moment degrading any of the other attempts to escape from the Island – some successful, some not – which were to take place during the Occupation, Denis Vibert's solo adventure must for all time remain one of the most remarkable and noteworthy.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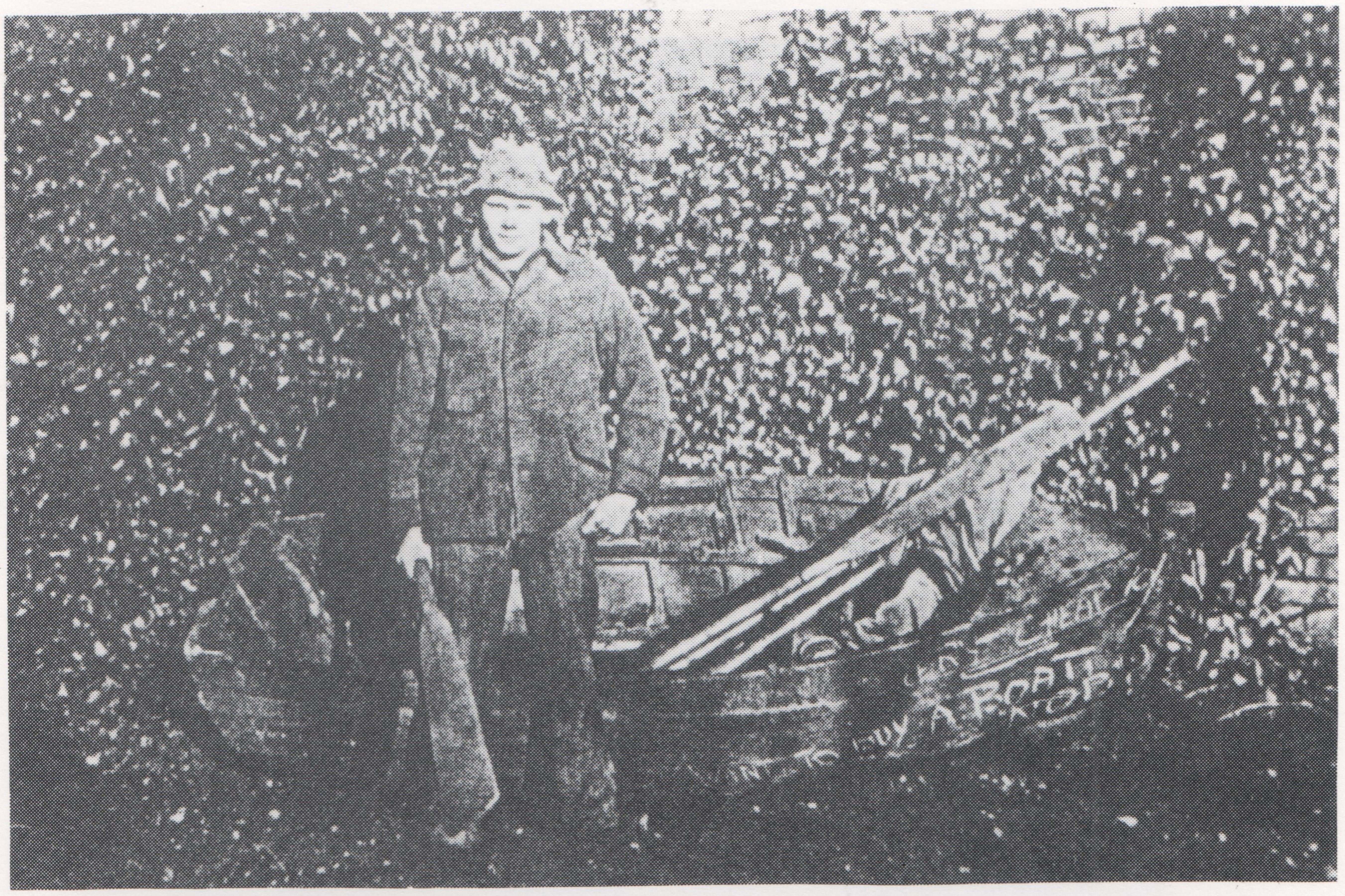
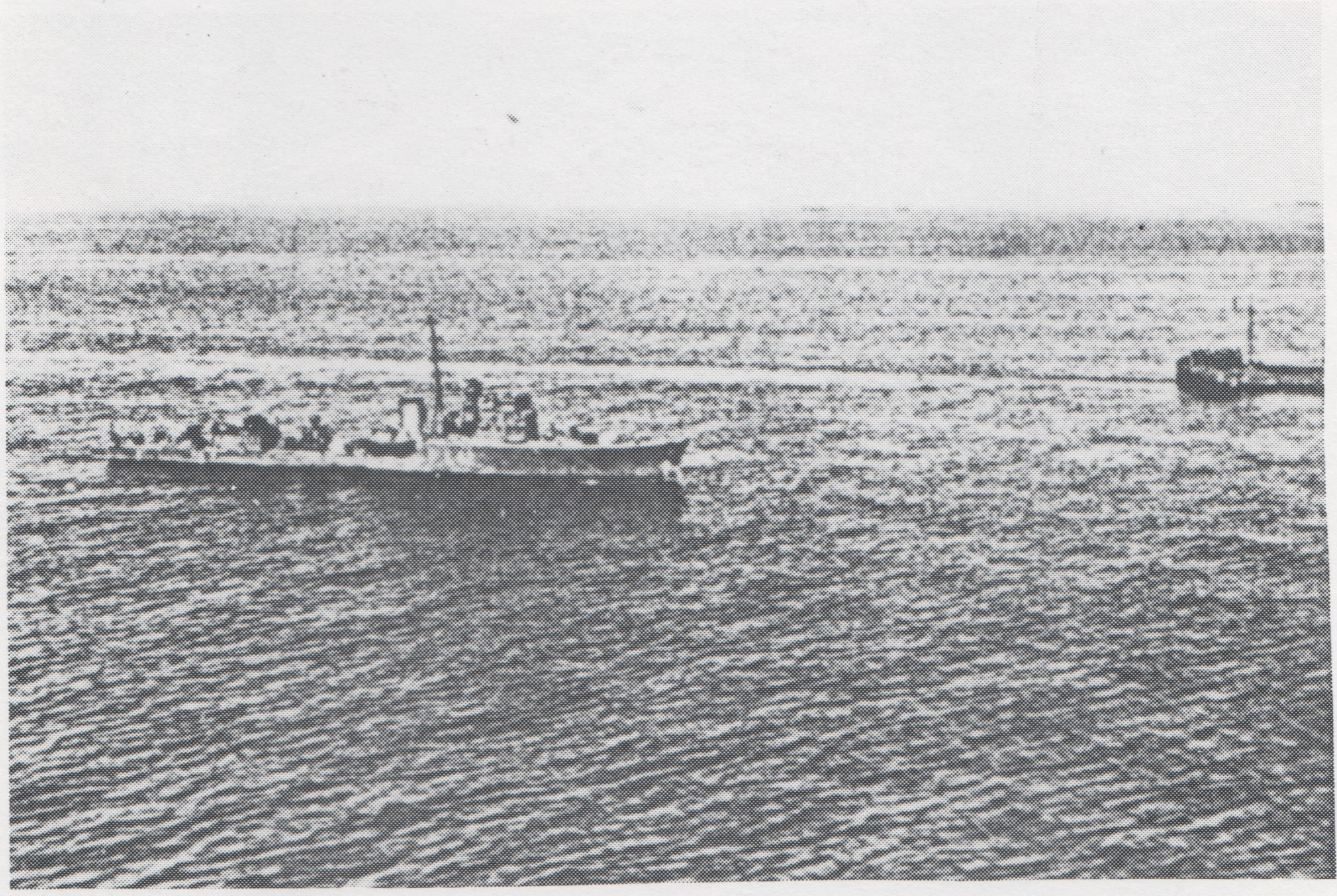
ST MALO
FRANCE
BRITTANY

Sketch map by Denis Vibert illustrating his escape route



Denis Vibert and 'Ragamuffin'



H.M.S. Brocklesby which picked up Denis Vibert off Portland Bill

The then Leading Seaman Fred Troughton, a crew member of H.M.S. Brocklesby

'Ragamuffin' now on display at La Hougue Bie, St. Saviour

A wartime photograph of Denis Vibert during his flying days with the R.A.F.

CHAPTER 2

"Capture and Deportation"

Peter Hassall, Maurice Gould & Denis Audrain

On 2 May 1942, these three young Jerseymen, one eighteen and the other two only fifteen years of age, attempted to escape from the Island to the United Kingdom in an open boat, taking with them a suitcase containing photographs of German defences.

Details of their venture are based on an entry in Leslie Sinel's Occupation Diary of 3 May 1942, and a letter by Peter Hassall published in the Jersey Evening Post soon after the Island was Liberated in May 1945.

The Diary entry reads...

"An attempt to leave the Island ends in tragedy when the boat containing three youths overturns off the south-east coast, and one of them, (named Audrain), is drowned; the other two (named Hassall and Gould), were taken prisoner by the Germans."

Peter Hassall's letter referred to their boat sinking some two miles off-shore, and whilst he was struggling to save Denis Audrain, Maurice Gould was attempting to destroy the military intelligence they were carrying; tragically, Denis – a non-swimmer – drowned. Peter and Maurice managed to swim back to the shore, where they hid overnight in an empty bungalow; the following day, they were discovered by the Germans and arrested.

Unfortunately, some of the military material was washed ashore, and the Germans reacted by deporting both the survivors firstly to Paris, where they both underwent rigourous interrogations and beatings by the S.S. and Gestapo for some six weeks.

They were then sent to work underground in a coal mine near Warsaw for four months, then to a salt mine for a further two months. They were moved to a prison near Trier, where Peter remained for twenty months working as a first-aid man for the many foreign forced-labour workers, and it was during this time that Maurice Gould contracted T.B. and died.

Peter was eventually sent to Breslau, in Silesia, where he was at last brought to trial, initially receiving the death sentence, commuted to eight years hard labour.

Happily, the advance of the Russian Armies brought about his release from captivity, and he was repatriated to England, the sole survivor of one of the few pre-D.Day attempts to have been made.

Denis Audrain – drowned 2 May 1942

CHAPTER 3

“Travel – Courtesy of the Third Reich”

Dennis Le Cuirot

Following the successful Allied landings on 6 June 1944, a feeling of freedom from the years spent under the German jackboot was increasing in the minds of the local inhabitants – the tide of war was turning, and a bridgehead was firmly established on the east of the Cherbourg peninsula.

In the early days of July, barges and small vessels were still plying between Jersey and the French harbours of St. Malo and Granville, which were still in German hands, and one young Jerseyman, 17 year old Dennis Le Cuirot, decided to make his bid to get to France, not by using a small boat, but by utilising the sea transport supplied by the German Reich!

Dennis was one of a number of youths who had been arrested by the Germans for alleged incitement of the crowds to demonstrate against the deportation of English residents to Germany in September 1942, and although, luckily, only placed on probation for two years, he had a feeling that eventually he might be arrested.

At the end of June 1944, a large number of French subjects who had been working in the northern Channel island of Alderney were transported to Jersey by their German masters on their way back to France, since there was a possibility that Alderney might soon be taken by the Allies, and it was whilst they were here awaiting transport to France that Dennis became friendly with some of them.

He discovered that there was little or no check on the workers' numbers or descriptions being made by the Germans, and he decided that here was his chance to get away.

He told his mother that the Germans had ordered him to report to the Feldkommandantur 515 at College House on the evening of 3 July, the night the French were due to leave, as he was being taken away; he invented this story to absolve her of any knowledge of his intended escape attempt in the event of possible trouble with the German authorities.

Dennis collected some small articles he thought he might need, together with some money, and, carrying his suitcase, calmly walked aboard the vessel which was taking the French people away, right under the noses of the German guards.

That evening the ship, carrying an estimated 500 men and women set sail for Granville. On the way, the course was changed, and in the early hours of 4 July, the ship, with her four escorting craft, was off Chausey Island when flares suddenly lit up the sky, having been intercepted by a force of British M.T.B's.

The Germans refused to stop and tried to make a break for it; the escort closed in on the ship for protection, and a naval engagement took place.

In a quarter of an hour, all four escort vessels had been sunk, and the ship carrying Dennis had received a torpedo in the bows and a shell hit aft; fearing the ship would sink, Dennis dived overboard and was in the water for some while. When the battle ceased, Dennis managed to climb back on. The ship restarted and made its way to St. Malo, where, Dennis recalls, only 100 women and 75 men were landed. The survivors were taken to a barracks in St. Servan, where they were kept under guard.

On 6 July, together with two Frenchmen, Dennis decided to attempt an escape; they climbed the barracks wall and got clear. Having heard that the Americans were at or near St. Lo, they decided to make their way to that town, where they did indeed meet up with the U.S. 3rd Army three days later.

Dennis remained with the American Army until mid-August, when he was flown back to England; he had hoped to be allowed to rejoin the Americans, but he was eventually directed into work in England with the Ever Ready Company.

Meanwhile in Jersey they were rumours that Dennis had been drowned, for the news that the convoy had been attacked soon became known in the Island.

Mrs. Le Cuirot actually went to 'Silvertide', the notorious Field Police and Gestapo Headquarters, and accused them of taking her son away to his death.

The Germans denied all knowledge of his whereabouts, a denial which she, of course, did not believe, but which, in fact, was quite true.

Upon reflection, after all these years, it must have taken more than a modicum of nerve to have attempted a venture which successfully utilised transport supplied by the enemy!

CHAPTER 4

“Beach Float Boys”

Francis Le Sueur, George Whithy and Garnet Briard

On 11 September 1944 these three Islanders made an escape attempt each paddling a beach-float, a small floating platform that had been a popular form of in-shore recreation with pre-War visitors to Jersey.

Masking tape had been used to caulk each float, and inflated car inner tubes had been fixed to each end of the float to provide extra buoyancy at sea.

The plan was to leave at dusk at about half-tide from the Le Bourg area on the South-East corner of the Island, paddle North-East to the Ecréhous Rocks, rest up there during the day, and then proceed to the French coast the next night.

They launched the floats successfully enough without being seen, and proceeded on their way; unfortunately, despite their attempts at caulking, all three floats became waterlogged, and, when daylight came, they found that they had been taken by the prevailing currents right round to the North of the Island, and were in danger of foundering on the Paternosters reef. A light North wind and inshore current, however, gradually took them inshore in the Ronez area, where the Germans were waiting for them; Garnet Briard, who had been further away from the coast than his two companions did, in fact, land on the Paternosters where he emptied his waterlogged float; realising the impossibility of continuing the venture he, too, followed the others to shore and was arrested.

They were taken to Melbourne House at St. John for questioning. Francis Le Sueur recalls being ‘quizzed’ by four German Officers, none of whom seemed particularly interested in the event, when a fifth Officer appeared, and immediately started berating him, accusing him – amongst other things – of "having a wireless on board his float". This absurd accusation prompted Francis – never one to 'suffer fools gladly' – to reply "Yes".

"What else did you have on board?" snarled the interrogator; "Only a grand piano", was the reply. This response quickly terminated the enquiry, and Francis was hustled out!

The trio were removed to the prison in Gloucester Street, St. Helier, to await trial. Francis and George were put in adjacent cells on the first floor, which normally housed all the women prisoners.

Using the end of a spoon, they scraped a communication hole between the cells; the spoil from these excavations was put in their chamber-pots and duly emptied down the W.C. each morning. This exercise eventually led to the system being blocked up, the water overflowing into the German's store-room below..."the authorities were very angry", recalls Francis. Both were then transferred to the male section which was used as a detention centre by the Germans for their own troops.

During this period of incarceration, Francis was taken on a number of occasions for questioning to La Folie Inn, which was undertaken by a mild scholarly-type German – very different from the young arrogant individual he had met in his first interrogation. He quite enjoyed these 'outings' because, apart from the pleasant walk to and from La Folie, he was able to supply his interrogator with the up-to-date news from the B.B.C., courtesy of André Aune who, until the latter's incarceration in prison for 'spreading the news', had owned a hairdresser's establishment in Bath Street, and had, in fact, brought the necessary materials to manufacture a crystal set in his cell!

Francis requested, and was refused, a supply of paper and a pencil; in retaliation, he scratched on his cell wall, with the aid of the overworked spoon-end, the words "In Russland Der Wermacht ist Kaput", and adorned his work with the Hammer and sickle. This art-work was eventually noticed, to the joy of the Ukranian orderlies working in the cell-block, but nothing further was heard about that episode; Charlie Bull, a former market gardener, who was also in prison for having a wireless set was ordered to remove this work of art, but failed, as it was more or less 'engraved' into the plaster.

On 10 October 1944, the three prisoners were taken to a house in Queen's Avenue, St. Helier, where, after presenting the case, the President of the Court Martial sentenced Francis and George to 15 months each, and Garnet – the youngest – to 6 months imprisonment. They were then handed over to the local civilian administration as 'political' prisoners, and taken back to Gloucester Street.

The Escape.

Shortly after starting his sentence, Francis was summoned to meet an English speaking German Officer who, in peace-time had been a Hamburg River pilot; knowing that Francis was a fisherman, and, indeed, a former Jersey Fishermen's representative, the German voiced an interest in purchasing fishing tackle, nets etc., in order to supplement their rations. Francis initially stalled the idea, but, in the meantime, worked out a plan for possible escape from prison. He eventually agreed to negotiate the sale of his fishing tackle which was stored at his home, on the understanding that one quarter of any catch would be handed over for the consumption of the locals imprisoned in Gloucester Street.

On 25 October Francis, on a bicycle which he had borrowed from the Chief Warder, together with the German Officer, rode out to the Le Sueur home at 'Beauvoir', Samarès Lane.

The front garden of the house was surrounded by a high wall; there was a small side door in the main entrance doors, and the fishing tackle was stored in the garage. Francis loaded his bicycle with tackle, and helped the German with his load of nets, which were draped over the handle-bars. Seeing that the German – literally – had his hands full, Francis slipped back, put the bolt on the door, jumped over the garden wall, and ran along the old disused Eastern Railway line as far as Jambart Lane, Pontac, to the property of Joe Le Masurier.

It was about 3 p.m. and, having seen no-one in his flight, he told Joe of his escape, and the latter immediately agreed to shelter him. (It is interesting to note that Joe's son, Edward, commonly known as 'Snipe' was himself to be involved in a successful escape from the Island the very next month).

Three evenings later, when listening to the B.B.C. news(Strictly Forbidden by the Germans!), the Breton maid employed by the Le Masurier's rushed into the lounge shouting "Les Boches son- la!". Francis ran upstairs, and jumped out of the window into the pitch dark, landing awkwardly on a concrete path; in intense pain, he crawled into a cabbage-patch, where he remained for about half-an-hour, until young Le Masurier gave him the 'all-clear'.

Although the purpose of the German patrol had not been made clear – they had discovered nothing 'untoward' – it was thought expedient to move Francis to another 'safe house', and to have his badly bruised heels attended to; a co-operative neighbour, Mrs. Poignard, kindly provided Francis with the necessary shelter. (Mrs.Poignard's son Dennis was the same young man who had been involved with the successful escape of Bernard Cavey & Co. on 19 September – See Chapter 6 – 'Paddle Power' I).

It was very necessary for Francis to receive medical attention quickly, and contact was made with Albert Bedane, who owned the Roseville Clinic, who agreed to assist medically and to offer him a safe haven.

Francis spent about ten days in a room at the Clinic, during which time contact had been made with Kenneth Parris who, with three other young men, were planning to escape very shortly.

They agreed to take Francis with them, and they all successfully reached France on 11 November 1944. (This attempt is recorded in Chapter 11 -'Five is a Crowd').

George Whithy himself also made a successful escape from the Gloucester Street prison, together with Frank Killer and Peter Curwood on 6 February 1945. (See Chapter 6 -'Paddle Power' II).

CHAPTER 5

“So Near and yet ...”

Belza Turner and Siebe Kosta

For those readers unaware of the atmosphere and conditions prevailing during the German Occupation, the exploits of Belza Turner could well be suggestive of a situation more appropriate to the skilful pen of Jersey resident and master novelist Jack Higgins.

The story which follows is, however, factual in every way, and records other events prior to the escape attempt which, in themselves, are more than worthy of note in this book.

The Turner Family

The Turners, an all-Canadian family, had settled in Jersey before the Second World War. The father was owner of the Bagot Laundry, and lived with his wife and three daughters – Belza, Violet and Edith – at ‘Richelieu’, Bagot, St. Saviour.

The whole family was involved in a number of passive – and not so passive – forms of resistance during the German Occupation, from the turning of German road signs (a very popular pastime of many youngsters), to the listening-into and distribution of the B.B.C. news bulletins obtained from their hidden wireless set, an action which, if caught, was subject to severe punishment, following the confiscation of all wireless sets by the Germans in June 1942.

Jack Ryder

One, as yet unpublished incident involving the Turner family relates to a young American/German by name of Jack Ryder, who had been brought up in America and had been caught in Germany in 1938 during a visit to his mother, and forced to join the German Army.

He found himself a member of the German Occupation Force in Jersey in late 1940 and, somehow, having heard of the Turners, and thinking they were Americans, made contact with them.

Before accepting him as 'genuine', and not an attempt at enemy infiltration, Mr. Turner discussed the matter with a prominent Jerseyman and several other trustworthy friends; to establish his bona-fides, Ryder produced his US Citizenship papers and his US Social Security Card.

It must be appreciated the the family was taking a calculated risk in developing any form of relationship with anyone in enemy uniform, not only for the attention it would draw on themselves in the event of the German authorities discovering the association, but also for the reaction of the local population who might, without knowledge of the full facts of the matter, accuse the family of collaboration with the enemy.

To avoid this possibility Ryder, when visiting the Turners, was always dressed in civilian clothes supplied by the family. He was requested to carry messages to and from France – content, sources and destinations unknown to this day – and this risky task he undertook successfully for nearly 2 years, until he was eventually picked up and arrested by the Gestapo in 1942.

The charges brought against him were unknown, and he was never seen or heard of again. Some years later, a friend in the International Red Cross informed the family that Ryder had been shipped off to the Eastern front in Russia with a prisoner detail; refusing to fight, he was chained to a machine-gun, ultimately wounded and, although screaming with pain and delirium, he was subsequently shot, still claiming that he was an American. Following Ryder's initial arrest, some connection between him and the Turners must have come to light, as the German authorities appeared to take more than a passing interest in the family's activities.

The Deportation.

When, on 15 September 1942, all non Jersey-born males between the ages of 16 and 70 and their families were ordered to be deported from the Island, the Turners were, naturally, on the list to go – they were told at that time by the Germans that their family was the most anti-German in the Island – a compliment indeed!

The first batch of deportees left the following day, and the second group on 18 September. As the method of call-forward was in alphabetical order, the Turners were not scheduled to go until the third batch on 29 September.

After waiting nearly 10 hours at the harbour in St. Helier on that day, the whole batch were told to go back home and wait for another date to be announced. Luckily for them, no further deportations took place, possibly due to the lack of sea-transport, so this last group were not added to the 1,186 others who had been deported and who eventually finished up in internment camps in Germany for the duration of the War.

From that time on and well into 1943, the family were subjected to house searches by the Germans at any time of day and night; one such visit was made at 3 a.m. by five soldiers, and Belza recalls herself and her two sisters dissolving into hysterical laughter when one soldier became stuck trying to get into the attic.

The Germans were probably trying to find their illicit wireless set – known by the family as 'Percy' – with which the family regularly listened to the B.B.C. news from London. For seven months in 1943, Belza used to type out 30 copies of the news bulletins – no carbon paper available – and circulated their 'B.B.C. Gazette' among trusted and known friends.

This effort came to an end when she was caught distributing them. Following a 3 day interrogation at 'Silvertide', the Headquarters of the German Field Police and Gestapo, she was sentenced to 15 days imprisonment for her 'crime'. For the record, 'Percy' was never found by the Germans, despite continual searches.

The year 1944 was to prove to be a year of even more incident to the Turner family in general, and for the 21 year old Belza in particular.

The Mustang Pilot.

Returning from escorting a bombing raid over Germany on 7 February 1944, 2nd Lieutenant Joseph M. Krebs was nursing a badly shot-up Mustang P51B fighter aircraft of the 355th Fighter Squadron, U.S. Army Air Force back to base.

Well off course, and with only 30 gallons of fuel left in his tanks, he found himself over Jersey which, like the rest of the Channel Island, was bristling with German flak batteries. The aircraft was hit and, before crashing, Lt. Krebs bailed out landing in St. Peter. He was captured by the Germans, treated in Hospital for injuries received during his parachute landing, and then taken to the civilian prison in Gloucester Street, to await his removal to a P.O.W. camp on the Continent.

Having heard on the 'grapevine' that an American flyer had been shot down, Belza was determined to try and see him. She bribed a friendly guard at the prison with some butter she had bought on the black market for RM20 (*c.* £2) – a valuable and expensive commodity at the time.

Even so, Belza was still surprised when the German agreed for her to see the American; so, too, was Lt. Krebs, as he feared that Belza might be a 'plant' sent to get information out of him, so he was very cautious at first. Eventually reassured, he gave her the name and address of his aunt in America – a Mrs. Dorothy McQueen of Madison, Wisconsin – in the hope that she could get a message to his relative.

Belza sent the message off the next morning through the Red Cross Message Office in St. Helier, and this read "Joe Jnr. fine and dandy, will write when settled, Love, Belza."

As Lt. Krebs was the only relative of Mrs. McQueen serving in the U.S. Forces, the lady immediately recognised her nephew as being the subject of the message, as he had been reported by the U.S. authorities as 'Missing in Action'. Belza's message was delivered in June 1944, and, although she waited for possible repercussions, none came. The Germans themselves did not notify the U.S. Authorities of Lt. Kreb's capture until near the end of the War.

On the pretext of collecting laundry, Belza was able to visit the American on a few more occasions, including his 23rd birthday, when she took him a birthday cake, not, admittedly, the same as we would expect today as the necessary ingredients were missing, but it was food, and the cake made his 23rd his most memorable birthday!

Shortly afterwards his German captors informed Lt. Krebs that he would soon be moved to France. Before his departure, and as a token of his appreciation, he gave Belza his Army Air Corps Class ring and his white silk flying scarf, both items she was to return to him some 20 years later!

Lt.Krebs was transferred to St. Malo on 15 February, thence to Stalag Luft 1 at Barth, near the Baltic Sea in North Germany, where he remained with about 11,000 other Allied Air Force Officers until the camp was liberated by the Russians in 1945.

When Belza visited Lt. Krebs in Gloucester Street prison, little did she imagine that she herself would become an inmate of that building within seven months!

The Escape Attempt.

In April 1944, a significant meeting took place, when a young man came into the Bagot Laundry shop where Belza was working.

He was a Dutch seaman, Siebe Kosta by name, who was working on the barges which used to ply between the Channel Islands and France. The two young people became friends and, following 'D-Day', and the subsequent re-occupation of the North-West of France by the Allies, they decided to make an attempt to escape from the Island; by the end of August the barges ceased operating between Jersey and France – as all ports were now in Allied hands – and were laid up in St. Helier Harbour.

During the second week in September Belza visited a doctor in St. Helier – name unknown – who, she had been advised, could probably help in supplying Intelligence regarding the local situation which might be of use to the Allies. Belza explained her proposed mission to him; the doctor, who knew Belza and the Turner family, merely nodded and made no comment.

Three days later – on 14 September – a man came into the laundry shop and gave Belza an envelope, which contained a list of all the American P.O.W's in Jersey, and a few small sketch maps detailing German gun emplacements etc. To carry this information, she made two small cotton bags and weighted them with small stones.

Belza wrote a letter to her parents which she left with a friend, explaining where she had gone, and which was to be delivered to them on the day of her departure – the 16 September.

In retrospect, the chosen embarkation point and time of departure must be considered to be nothing short of audacious – the swimming pool at Havre-des-Pas – during the hours of daylight.

Siebe, who had access to the harbour area, had managed somehow to remove a rubber dinghy from one of the German ships moored there, and had brought it to the rendezvous at Havre-des-Pas at 6.30 p.m., where he met up with Belza, who had been escorted there on a bicycle by a friend, Peter Valpy.

Why this point of embarkation was chosen is somewhat mystifying, as this spot is by no means the closest point to the French coast and, in addition, the rocks and sea currents off-shore in this area would make any journey in a small boat – let alone a rubber dinghy – hazardous enough under normal conditions.

Nevertheless, the dinghy was launched, and it is amusing to recall that a group of some 50 German soldiers swimming in the bathing pool waved to the couple, no doubt thinking that the bearded and fair-headed Siebe was one of their comrades taking his girl-friend for a row!

Expecting to make the trip in the matter of hours they, rashly, took no extra food with them. Soon, in the open sea, with changing winds and currents, they were blown off-course and in due time had to accept the fact that they were lost.

It is possible that they may have got within striking distance of the French coast, but, cold and hungry, and drifting to and fro at the mercy of the tides, they eventually made a landfall after 76 hours at sea, at 10 p.m. on 19 September, not their intended goal of the French coast, but at La Corbière, on the South-West coast of Jersey!

Belza, whose hands were now badly blistered through rowing, and who had spent some time bailing-out the dinghy with a milk bottle, fortunately had the presence of mind to throw the weighted bags containing the Military intelligence into the sea before they abandoned the dinghy, which had collapsed on some rocks a fair distance from the shore.

The couple were up to their shoulders in deep water, completely soaked to the skin, and when they eventually reached the shore-line, they were 'greeted' by German soldiers and the Field Police who, at first, thought that they had come from the French port of Brest, where the Germans had uncovered a Resistance group. For the next few days, both Belza and Siebe were subjected to intense interrogations at the Pomme d'Or Hotel, Headquarters of the Kriegsmarine in Jersey.

Meanwhile Belza's parents, who had received her letter on 16 September were sure, by the 19th, that she had reached France successfully. However, the following day the Germans came to the Turner household enquiring as to Belza's whereabouts. Mrs. Turner, according to a pre-arranged plan, told them that her daughter was out for the week-end staying with an unknown girl-friend. Of course, the Germans knew precisely where Belza was, but did not advise the family until some ten days later, when Mrs. Turner was summoned to the Pomme d'Or Hotel, where she was re-united with her daughter.

Belza recalls:

"My Mother's first words to me were 'Good Heavens. What have they done to you?', but, actually, other than the incessant interrogations hour after hour every day, feeling so hungry, and desperately needing clean clothes, which had become saturated on landing and dried on me, and my hands, which were healing slowly from blood blisters caused by three days and nights of rowing, ... I was in pretty good shape!! ... Hungry?? ... that was another story altogether ... I guess, however, I must have looked pretty awful!! "

Belza was subsequently allowed two clean clothes parcels per month.

Court Martial and Imprisonment.

Belza and Siebe were taken to the Gloucester Street prison where they were kept in solitary confinement for fourteen weeks awaiting their trial by Court Martial, which took place on 19 December 1944 at the Feldkommandantur 515 at College House.

Belza recalls that the Court constituted 12 German officers, one Judge from the German Military Court based in Normandy, and two from Germany. The trial lasted nine hours in all, with the two accused placed on opposite sides of the court room and both under strict guard. They were sentenced to be held in prison 'for the duration of the War' at the Gloucester Street prison.

Another American Connection.

Whilst exercising in the prison yard on Christmas Eve 1944, Belza heard someone singing 'Lullaby of Broadway' in his cell. She called out to the voice – they couldn't see each other – and the reply came saying that he was an American from New York, and when Belza told him she was a Canadian, he replied "I guess that makes us cousins." Belza chatted with the prisoner and promised to share her Christmas dinner with him if she could return to the exercise yard. As a 'political' prisoner, Belza was able to receive food parcels from outside the prison, and her Mother was able to send in a cooked rabbit with some vegetables. Belza wrapped up a share for the unknown 'Voice', who threw a length of string down from his cell window and hauled up his feast.

The weather turned cold and wet after this episode, and Belza was not able to go outside in the yard for a week or so, and when she did manage to get some exercise, the 'Voice' had gone.

It was not until some 40 years later – in 1985 – when reading an article entitled 'British & American P.O.W's in Jersey', published in the 1983 edition of the 'Channel Islands Occupation Review', that Belza realised that the 'Voice' was that of Lieutenant George Haas, who was at that time serving a sentence for an attempted escape from the Allied P.O.W.Camp at South Hill, St. Helier.(Lieutenant Haas did successfully escape from Jersey with a fellow American Officer a very short while after the above incident – their story is recorded in Chapter 15).

Belza and Siebe were eventually released from prison on 30 April 1945, nine days before the Liberation of Jersey, in time for her to join her two sisters, Violet and Edith, in a theatrical Review staged at the Forum Cinema on 15 May entitled, appropriately 'Happy Release'!

Postscript.

Siebe Kosta left the Island after the Liberation to join the Royal Netherlands Air Force; recent efforts to trace him through the Netherlands Ministry of Defence, the Red Cross and other Dutch Organisations have all come to naught.

Belza left the Island in June 1945 and joined the Field Ambulance Nursing Yeomanry (F.A.N.Y.), then undertook her training at Chickley Hall before being stationed in London.

She returned to Canada in 1946, two years later marrying Reginald Greene in Montreal. She raised a family of two sons and a daughter; was widowed in 1986 and now lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

An echo from the Occupation years was sounded during the Spring of 1964, when Joseph Krebs, now a Major in the Army Air Force was involved in a training exercise at an air base some 80 miles from Toronto, where Belza and her family were currently living. It was during a week-end break that Major Krebs drove over to see Belza, and it was at this meeting that the ring he had given to her some twenty years previously at the prison in Jersey was returned to its rightful owner....

Belza Turner in her F.A.N.Y. uniform, 1946

The Bathing pool at Havre-des-Pas

CHAPTER 6

'Paddle Power' – I

Bernard Cavey, Oscar Horman & Charles Bondis
Edward Le Corre & Douglas Davey
and
Frank Killer, Hugh La Cloche & Peter Curwood

One of the first Escape projects during the main escape 'period' between September and November 1944 was put into practice on 20 September, but the build-up to that started soon after the Allied Forces landed in Normandy on D-Day, the 6th of June 1944, when a small 'secret society' of some 15 young men in Jersey was formed with the idea of sabotaging the German war effort in every possible way. Various ideas were suggested, but in every case rejected, owing to the risk of reprisals on the completely defenceless civilian population.

By early August the Allies had broken out from their Normandy bridgehead; St. Malo, some 30 or so miles to the south of Jersey, had been cut off, and the American Forces had reached Brest on the Atlantic coast. A suggestion was made that if a small group could reach France with information on the German troop concentrations and gun positions etc. in Jersey, these facts could be of great value to the Allies. This suggestion was received with enthusiasm, and 8 individuals were chosen to carry out this mission. They were split into three groups as designated above, and they began at once to draw up the necessary plans, which included dividing the Island into sectors for obtaining the necessary Intelligence on the disposition of the Occupying Forces; information on navigation was supplied by Peter Guiton, a States' Harbour Pilot (who was also instrumental in a number of escape attempts) and John Picot from St. Ouen. Such information was then 'pooled' and collated; one important pre-requisite in the selection of the escape party was that all should be able to swim, and that, in the event of anyone getting into difficulties at sea, the others would 'press on', thereby not jeopardizing the whole operation.

Having collected all the possible information on the Occupying Forces, the next problem to be solved was from where to obtain suitable craft for the sea journey. The Germans had prohibited the use of all boats by locals since 1941, and all small craft had been assembled and were under continual guard in three harbours.

The group's thoughts then turned to the possibility of using canoes, and although they had been advised against using this type of flimsy craft, they were keen to pursue this idea. Two members, Mark Burger and Peter Curwood, each actually owned canoes which, in defiance of heavy penalties, they had not registered with the German authorities.

Both craft were in a very bad condition, having been unused for a number of years, and much difficulty was experienced in attempting to render them watertight; the canoe eventually allocated to Eddie Le Corre and Douglas Davey was a 14ft Folboat, which required much reconditioning and patching up in over twenty places before it was considered to be, hopefully, seaworthy; the craft to be used by Peter Curwood, Frank Killer and Hugh La Cloche was made of wood and canvas, probably originally constructed locally; both canoes were hidden in stables at Palmyra Road, St. Helier, premises owned by the Curwood's family business of Funeral Furnishers.

To coincide with a favourable tide and near-to-moonless night, it had been planned to make the attempt in the early morning of Wednesday 20 September 1944, from the beach at Pontac on the East of the Island and the nearest point to France, but it wasn't until late afternoon on the Tuesday that Bernard Cavey, Charles Bondis and Oscar Horman managed to obtain a suitable canoe from a dealer at St. Aubin, by name of Kensole, for the sum of 300 Marks (about £32). This canoe was clinker-built of Canadian pine – approximately 21ft long with a beam of 18 inches; it had obviously been designed and built professionally for use on the Canadian Lakes with a normal seating capacity for two persons (with three people aboard the freeboard was between $2^1/_2$ and 3 inches!).

Moving the canoes from both locations to the embarkation point at Pontac was arranged by Charles, an employee in the Jersey States' Transport Office; he was luckily in a position to obtain the necessary Forms required authorising the use of a charcoal-burning lorry, plus the services of a volunteer driver, one Arthur Marett, whose very risky participation in this venture deserves the highest commendation, particularly in view of developments later that day.

The canoe from St. Aubin was moved without incident, despite the fact that several Germans and locals witnessed it being loaded on to the lorry. On reaching Pontac safely, Bernard Cavey and party contacted Dennis Poignard, who readily agreed to hide the craft until it was collected later that evening.

The lorry then returned to St. Helier, first dropping off Bernard, Charles and Oscar at their respective homes, thence to Curwood's stables to collect the other two canoes, where the rest of the party and helpers were assembled.

Curfew at that time was 10 p.m., and Bernard left home at 9.15, meeting Charles and Oscar en route. The trio were about to enter the stables when they were challenged by a German soldier, who was billeted in a house on the opposite side of the road, and who had apparently been attracted by the sound of the lorry starting up. At this moment, the stable doors opened, revealing the lorry containing the other two canoes, which were concealed under a tarpaulin, and the other five prospective escapees.

On seeing the lorry, the German ignored the trio outside and concentrated his attentions on the lorry and its occupants inside the stables. This sudden change of tactic was seized upon by the trio, who immediately made themselves scarce, returned to their homes, picked up their bicycles, and made their way to Pontac, wondering whether they would see the rest of the party again.

Eddie Le Corre, who was one of the party inside the stable, and Arthur Marett the driver, both recognised the German as an Under-Officer by name of Gretz, who worked in the HKP German Garage stores, and a person with whom they had both had contact during their normal daily jobs. The German questioned them, walked to the back of the lorry, lifted the flap of the tarpaulin, and let it drop back after seeing the contents. Turning to the very apprehensive party, he demanded to see their Identity Cards, after which he told them to report to the Feldgendamerie at College House – the *following* morning! He then left the stables; breathing sighs of relief at this narrow escape, the party waited until the coast was clear and then continued the operation. In manoeuvering the lorry out of the stables, the longer canoe – designated for the Killer-Curwood – La Cloche trio – hit a wall, a significant incident, as time would eventually tell.

The lorry reached Pontac without further incident, in itself a piece of good fortune, as all were out after curfew and in danger of being apprehended by German patrols at any time during the journey; the canoes were unloaded and hidden, and Marett returned to St. Helier with his lorry; Bernard and his two companions on their bicycles arrived shortly afterwards.

The time which had passed since the meeting earlier in the day and the arrival of the escape party had not been wasted by the splendid Dennis Poignard; in the meantime, he had arranged to obtain the services of Len Le Cuirot, who had intimate knowledge of the rocks and gullies in the coastal area of Pontac, and who had volunteered to guide the party from the shore to the tide-line; the eight prospective escapees then rested up in Le Cuirot's bungalow near the sea-shore until the early hours.

At about 3 a.m. they all left the bungalow, climbed down the sea-wall by means of a rope ladder, pausing under the wall while a German patrol passed, and then silently followed their guide in single file across the short patch of sand to the rocks where the canoes were hidden under sea-weed. The paddles, compasses and other equipment they had carried were stowed away, and they took up their positions for carrying the canoes to the sea, a distance of about 2 miles; during the whole of this time not one word was spoken, and the escapees would have had an extremely difficult task weaving their way through the innumerable gullies to their embarkation point, had it not been for the expertise afforded by Len Le Cuirot and Dennis Poignard.

They reached the sea-line without further incident, and at 5 a.m. on 20 September, after final handshakes all round, the three canoes set off with high hopes of every prospect of success.

The Journey – and Problems!

Bernard, Charles and Oscar in their 'Canadian' canoe led the party, followed by Frank, Hugh, and Peter in the red one, with the rubber Folboat paddled by Eddie and Douglas bringing up the rear.

They made their way cautiously down a gully with the rocks at times only a few yards away from them. They passed Icho Tower and, after riding the waves, came to the open sea just as the tide was on the turn. The sea was calm with a slight ground-swell; it was starlight, and there was a slight sea-mist.

All went well for some time, until the crew of the red canoe reported that they had sprung a leak, the damage probably having been sustained when it struck the stable wall earlier; initially, it was not considered sufficiently serious enough to warrant abandoning the attempt, but a few minutes later the occupants reported that the canoe was leaking in an alarming way and listing badly.

The other two canoes paddled across to help, but they were reminded in no uncertain terms of the previously agreed arrangement they had made in the event of this kind of emergency occurring; Frank, Hugh and Peter in the damaged canoe decided to try and run for a group of rocks before it sank. (What eventually happened to this trio is described later in this chapter).

The other two canoes pressed on without further incident, except for hearing an engine in the distance sea-ward and seeing a searchlight coming into play, presumably from a German patrol boat; fortunately they were not detected, and after about ten minutes the light went out and the sound of the engine died away.

At about 7 a.m. they changed course to the South/East, and by this time a friendly current had come into play and they made good progress. During the whole of this time the sea had been relatively calm, but when dawn broke there was a very heavy sea-mist and it was impossible to see for any distance; when the mist eventually lifted a little, both crews were amazed to find that they were within 100 yards of each other.

Oscar now needed to take a rest from paddling, so Bernard continued to paddle alone until 9.45 a.m., when Oscar began paddling again. Both crews came together and exchanged cigarettes and matches, and they all remarked later how white and drawn they all appeared to each other; this was hardly surprising, when one considers the extreme physical efforts they had been involved in, particularly after over four years of Occupation 'diet'.

They then saw seagulls, and knew that land was not far away; the sun came up, the air became warmer, the mist eventually cleared, and, lo and behold – the French coast became visible; at about this time, and Eddie recalls an American aircraft flying over them, dipping its wings, and departing.

After sighting land, the two crews took things more leisurely, and half a mile or so from the shore they hailed a French fishing boat, requested their whereabouts, and received advice on the best place to land; the fishermen told them that they were near Blainville-sur-Mer.

The two canoes cut through the surf and ran for the beach. The Folboat, containing Eddie and Douglas, made good progress and had practically reached the beach when a wave broke and completely swamped them; Bernard , Charles and Oscar followed the Folboat, and they also finished up in exactly the same way, Bernard losing his shoes in the process.

Soaked to the skin, they picked up their craft and dragged them above the water-line; this physical effort proved extremely exhausting. All of them could hardly stand or walk after spending the previous six hours or so in such cramped and uncomfortable positions. The time was now 11 a.m., and the crossing of some six hours must qualify the group for the 'Blue Riband' of the Jersey-France route!

Their approach had been observed from the shore by a couple of French fishermen sitting on the sea-wall, who must have enjoyed a quiet chuckle to themselves when the canoes capsized while running aground. When approached, the locals inferred that they thought the five escapees were 'a bunch of young fools from Paris on a spree', and appeared somewhat doubtful of the actual facts of the matter.

The five decided to walk to Blainville, some two or so kilometres away, and report their arrival to the Mayor. Progress was very slow and painful, although they had been fortified by broaching a bottle of Tonic Wine carried by Eddie, they were all wet-through and Bernard was bare-footed.

When they finally reached Blainville, news of their arrival soon spread through the little town, and it seemed to them that the whole population turned out to look at them; one 'local' voiced his amazement that they had only taken six hours for the journey, he, at some time or other, having taken eleven hours to cover the same distance in a motor-boat.

At the Town Hall the Mayor was away, but his Secretary gave them a piece of paper to obtain food from a local hotel; while they were there, an old man appeared who had been detailed to look after them, and he took them to the Mercantile Marine Office, where they gave details of their canoes, and received a promise that the craft would be brought up from the beach and stored until after the War. The fishermen on the beach, meanwhile, had salvaged a few of their belongings and, after collecting these, the five returned to meet the Mayor, who had returned.

After repeating their story, it was agreed that they would have to contact the Americans, in whose Army Sector they had landed, and who were based some 4 kms away at Coutainville: at about this time, an American Officer arrived at the Town Hall, and he agreed to take them in his jeep.

On arrival at Coutainville, the five had a good meal and Bernard was given a pair of boots. Following a friendly and informal interrogation by the Americans, all possible doubts as to the bona-fides of the five escapees were dispelled; during this interview, Bernard was able to give the Americans the ranks, numbers and names of their comrades who had been wounded and captured during the fighting on the Cherbourg peninsula some weeks before, and who had been moved to Jersey just before the Allies had over-run the area; Bernard had obtained this information from his sister, who was a student nurse at the General Hospital in Jersey, where many of the wounded had been attended to.

There had obviously been liaison between the Americans and the British Forces in the area, as the five were then taken to Granville and handed over to the Royal Marines, where they were de-briefed by a R.M. Captain, and advised that they would be taken to Bayeux, prior to embarking for England. During their two day sojourn in Granville, Eddie Le Corre was taken ill and sent to the sick-bay where he was examined and found to have overstrained his heart owing to the physical exertions involved in the escape; he was moved by ambulance to Bayeux Field Hospital where he received further treatment.

The remaining four were taken to Bayeux and handed over to the Military Police, who were camped in a small park in the centre of the town; following yet another interrogation by a Captain in the Intelligence Corps, they were moved to No.60 Transit Camp near Arromanches, and the following morning they were marched with a large number of personnel from all three Services to the Mulberry Harbour, and on to a L.S.T., which, remarkably, was under the command of a Jerseyman who, on finding out they were on the passenger list, invited them up to his cabin for a beer before they sailed.

The journey to England was a slow overnight crossing, the weather having deteriorated during the preceding few days, and they finally arrived at Southampton the following morning, Wednesday 26 September 1944. Bernard Cavey remembers that the trip was made more interesting by the transfer of a Mercedes car from one L.S.T. to another....."I presume a bit of War loot, as this was the only item transferred, to the accompaniment of jibes and comments from the occupants of both vessels!"

At Southampton they were again questioned, and the following day they were taken to London where, at the Channel Islands Refugee Centre, they were kitted out, replacing the few pathetic items of clothing they had been wearing, which had made them stand out like 'sore thumbs', notwithstanding the fact that London at that time was not exactly the fashion centre of the World! Items such as Jersey Postage Stamps and banknotes which had been issued during the Occupation proved of great interest to the people working at the Centre.

A further de-briefing by a Lieutenant in the R.N. Intelligence Branch took place, and Bernard recalls how amazed he was at the amount and detailed information the Allies possessed. When he queried this, the Lieutenant told him that much of the information had been obtained from Russian and other foreign nationals who had been liberated by the Allies in France, and who had actually worked at some time on the Island fortifications as prisoners of the Todt Organisation; it was, possibly, rather an anti-climax to realise that British Intelligence were already in possession of far more detail than the escapees were able to provide. One exception to this, however, was a concise report that Bernard was able to give regarding the building of a bunker at Princes Tower, St. Saviour, about which Intelligence was unaware; he had been working as a farm labourer in the near vicinity had observed the construction of the bunker on a day-to-day basis,and was therefore able to produce a sketch-map of this project and its adjacent defences.

The four young escapees were then 'cleared' to leave, and they went their separate ways....

Douglas Davey joined the R.A.F., and Charles Bondis went to work for a wine merchant in London, where a month or so later he met up with Eric Prain, who had himself, with four other companions, just completed their successful escape from Jersey. (See a later Chapter).

Bernard Cavey joined the Fleet Air Arm on 16th October, leaving the Service on Class 'B' Release in May 1946. He then travelled to Rhodesia, joined the British South Africa Police, retiring on pension in April 1969.

When on leave in Jersey from Rhodesia, he again met up with the canoe which had taken him and his three fellow-escapees to France. It had been returned to Jersey, as promised by the Mayor of Barneville, through the good offices of the French Consul in Jersey. Bernard took the canoe back with him to Rhodesia where he used it on the lakes and rivers, including the Zambesi, a far cry from its original home waters; sadly, being of wooden construction, it did not stand up to the climatic conditions of Africa or the attentions of borers and termites, and it eventually rotted away.

He moved into Government Service, eventually retiring as Secretary General for the Catering Industry Council, retiring – for the second time – from that post in 1989. That year he visited his sister, Mrs Joan Syvret, in Jersey, and discovered, much to his chagrin, that he did not qualify to own a house or property in the Island, having been away too long.

He returned to Zimbabwe and was contracted, on an annual basis, as a Property Consultant to the Catering Industry Pension Fund.

The fifth member of the party, Eddie Le Corre, who had remained in France in medical care, was eventually discharged from the Military Hospital and crossed over to England on 1st October 1944. He underwent further medical examinations and de-briefings, following which he joined the Fleet Air arm on a 9 year engagement, serving in the Middle and Far East on aircraft carriers, and attaining the rank of Petty Officer. He returned to Jersey, and for many years past was employed as a Port Control Officer.

So much for the five whose escape ended in success, but what of the rest of those involved with the operation? Of the three whose attempt had to be aborted, more anon.

For those remaining in the Island, mention must be made of Arthur Marett, who had delivered the three canoes to Pontac, and who had been involved in the altercation outside Curwood's stables. He was arrested by the Germans, as indeed was Len Le Cuirot, and both served prison sentences for their part in the escape plan.

The Poignard family, who had been very instrumental in this successful escape, went on to contribute their brave and invaluable help in further attempts, in particular the one involving Francis Le Sueur. (See Chapter 4).

Bernard Cavey

Eddie Le Corre

Unfortunately, photographs of the other three – Douglas Davey, Charles Bondis and Oscar Horman — are not available

"Paddle Power" – II

Capture, Escape and Evasion

We now turn back to see what happened to the three young men – Frank Killer, Hugh La Cloche and Peter Curwood – who were left struggling with a sinking canoe off the south-east coast of the island in the early hours of 20 September 1944.

Nearly 50 years later, one of the survivors of this frightening experience, Frank Killer, described what happened....

'Despite bailing out furiously, the canoe seemed to slip away from under us. We kept afloat with the help of the paddles and part of what I took to be a life-jacket floating nearby. We had stripped off except for our underpants and, in my case, a pullover. I stuffed the life-jacket under it. We managed to swim to a rock where we rested until we were washed off again by the rising tide; we swam to another rock and then to others as the water rose. Each time we stopped, we shouted for help..'

It was daylight when they neared the beach at Le Hocq. Their calls for help had been heard – the Germans were waiting. Someone – probably a German – but Frank can't remember – came out in a rubber dinghy, and helped to pull them in. They were frozen and exhausted, and barely had strength to walk up the beach; Peter recalled being half-carried by one of their captors.

They were taken to a German Mess, and then to the Ladies' College, which had been taken over as a German Naval Hospital. Frank remembers being paraded in front of laughing German nurses and, when he wanted to pass urine, was given a metal pot and told to perform in front of them.

Later, they were taken to La Folie Inn where they were separated for questioning. One of the interrogators was rather unpleasant, and Frank was made to stand with his hands above his head, shivering with cold and fatigue. At lunch time, during a break in questioning, he was left in the charge of an elderly German Marine who put a blanket round his shoulders and gave him a bowl of soup, indicating that he should eat it quickly before the others returned. There was also a radio in the room, and by sign language, this kindly man let his prisoner know he could listen to the news – a remarkable suggestion when, officially, even listening to, let alone possessing, a radio was a serious offence.

Frank was not unknown to the Germans. He had been court martialled two years earlier for taking part in a demonstration against the deportation of English residents to Germany, and for escaping from arrest, in September 1942. He had also been involved, with Basil Le Brun, in beating up a collaborator who worked for the German Security Police, and had been seen accompanying them in 'hunts' for escaped Russian slave labourers.

On their way by car from La Folie Inn to the prison in Gloucester Street, Frank was amazed to see his friend, Basil Le Brun, pushing a boat on a cart, in broad daylight, along the pier; the boat in which Basil and two Frenchmen would make a successful escape that very night. (See Chapter 7).

On 26 October 1944, the three escapees were court martialled and sentenced to twelve months imprisonment. On returning to the prison, they were transferred to the section where those already sentenced were confined. There they met others imprisoned for various anti-German activities, at one time sharing a cell with a local policeman, Jock Macdonald. Another cell-mate was Eddie Langlois, who had been imprisoned for supplying a boat for the ill-fated escape attempt by Michael Neil and his friends (see Chapter 10). Mrs Langlois smuggled in a rabbit pie which Eddie shared with the others in his cell.

At one stage in his imprisonment, before sentence, Frank contracted dysentery, and was isolated in a cell by himself. He was too weak to get to the toilet, and eventually to even get on a bucket. He lost a lot of weight, but fortunately recovered. Some time later he had a tooth removed, and sucked the gum to keep it bleeding; taken to the Hospital, he was kept there by Dr. John Hanna, but was unable to escape as he had promised the doctor he would not do so, as that might stop other, genuine patients, from receiving treatment. Mrs Inverness-Bathe, a family friend, sent him a roast duck – hardly a common commodity in those times; Frank took it to a 'quiet corner', and ate the lot! (He has remained partial to duck ever since).

The thought of further escape was never far away; it became urgent when a message was smuggled in to say that someone had been 'talking' about their other 'activities' – they had been taking maps of the German fortifications to France; this had been suggested by the Prosecutor at their trial, but they had successfully denied it.

Frank and Peter Curwood, together with George Whithy, who had been caught trying to escape on a beach float in September (see Chapter 4), planned a break-out for early February.

Frank stole a chisel from the prison workshop, and on the day they broke out, Peter 'liberated' the hose-pipe of a stirrup-pump kept in their corridor to deal with incendiary bombs.

After dark, on 6 February 1945, they forced the bars on a window, and climbed on to the flat roof of a building which backed on to the prison wall. The top of the wall was festooned with broken glass. They hitched the hose to a barbed-wire stanchion, and threw the free end over the wall, after padding the top with a blanket to protect themselves and the pipe from the glass. The top was about ten feet above the roof. Frank helped George and Peter up and over, but there was no one to help him. Prison walls are smooth on the inside to hinder those wanting to get out. Frank was trying desperately to get to the top when there were noises from below, and a bell started ringing. Thinking that the alarm had been given, he took a running jump from the roof and got astride the wall; the blanket slipped, and he was badly cut.

In the meantime, Peter had started back up to see what was happening; their combined weight was too much for the hose, for it cut through on the glass, and Frank fell a considerable height to the pavement, fortunately missing his friends. He injured his back and ankle, and was helped away in the blacked-out street by the other two; they took him to a side door of the Hospital, where Raymond Osmont and John Le Sueur, who were on the Medical Staff, patched him up in the doctor's quarters. (Some years later, X-Rays showed signs of an old vertebral fracture).

George Whithy went off alone to a safe house in St. Clement, Frank and Peter, the former being helped by the latter, 'walked' to Clarence Le Brun's farm, 'Beauchamp', at Sion, St.John, where they spent the night in a loft.

Frank recalled ...' I may have been in shock, but since then I have never believed anyone who writes, or says, that hay is warm in winter, and the only thing I wanted was to be back in the security of my cell...'

The next day they moved across the road to Mr. Holmes' farm, where they were walled in with bales of hay in a loft above the cow stable. After a couple of days, they separated. Peter Curwood was hidden by Captain Yates at his home in Queen's Road. Frank went to Bill and Gwenda Sarre's property, 'Clifton', at Millbrook. Dr. R. McKinstry, the Medical Officer of Health, obtained a false Identity Card for Frank in the name of Cameron, and Gwenda Sarre dyed his ginger hair black; he recalls playing chess with an escaped Russian Officer who used to 'pop in' from time to time for something to eat, and a change of venue.

Later, Frank moved to Frank Le Calvez's farm, 'Les Fougeres', at St. John. There he met 'George', another escaped Russian prisoner who was being looked after by Frank Dorey, the Le Calvez's next-door neighbour, and another Russian, Michael, who seemed to have 'no fixed abode'.

When they were warned that several farms in St. John were being searched for escapees, Frank moved for a while to a house at the top of Mourier Valley, where he was hidden and fed by a Canadian lady, Mrs. Mitchell, and her son Peter. They didn't have much food to share, and Frank remembers being very hungry; he narrowly missed recapture one day when he inadvertently walked into a road block further down the valley.

When it was safe, he returned to 'Les Fougeres'. One day he was standing at the upstairs window when two Feldgendamerie patrols rode slowly past looking at the house. As soon as they were out of sight round the corner of the building, he jumped into the garden and ran across a field and hid behind a hedge; fortunately, they were not looking for him that day.

While hiding at the Sarre's, Frank got a message to his parents, who walked out to meet him in a copse in Waterworks Valley. The Germans had searched his home after he had escaped and found an illegal radio; his father and brother Stanley had been arrested, and the last bit of food in the house had been stolen by the searchers. Frank was horrified to see how thin his father was, and how emaciated and frail his mother had become.

A plan to escape from La Saline with Olga Le Calvez and Gordon Stuart by stealing a boat from Waterworks Valley came to nothing. With Olga, Frank had watched the Germans using the safe path through the minefield above La Saline, but on the night they were to go, their transport failed to turn up. By that time, the end of the war, and Liberation, were nearer than they had thought, and before they could make other plans, the Germans surrendered.

Frank hitched a ride home on a milk lorry to a warm welcome from his family; he found that Peter Curwood had hidden for the last few weeks at his home in Rouge Bouillon, above a stable yard which was in constant use by the Germans. Hugh La Cloche had remained in prison until the Liberation.

Following the Liberation, Frank Killer joined the Royal Air Force and saw service in the Far East. After demobilisation, he studied Medicine at Bristol University; following a spell in General Practice, he rejoined the R.A.F. While doing tests to become a Flying Doctor, he felt the first symptoms of Poliomyelitis. Fortunately, he recovered quickly, but his convalescence coincided with the Air Ministry's decision that 'rockets were in, and manned aircraft were out'; instead of joining a flying course, he was sent to Edinburgh to do surgery.

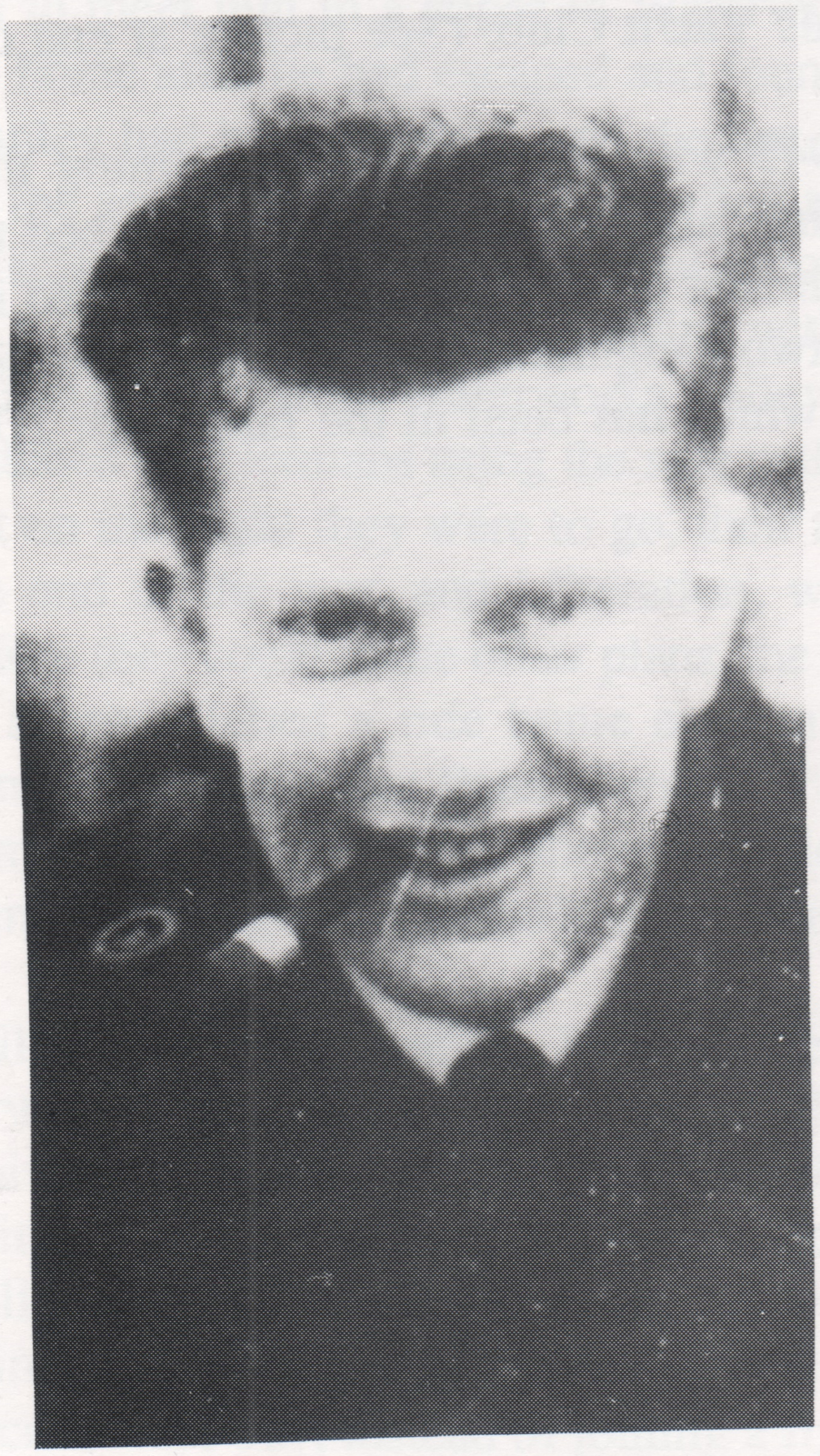
Overseas service followed, invariably in trouble spots like Aden, Cyprus, and later, Ghana, where he and his wife witnessed, at rather too close quarters, the coup d'état which overthrew Kwame Nkrumah. In 1972, he took early retirement as a Wing Commander, and migrated to Australia.

He was a Consultant Surgeon for eighteen years in the Latrobe Valley area of Victoria before moving to Canberra, where he now does Medico-legal work – assessing patients injured at work or on the road – for lawyers and Insurance Companies.

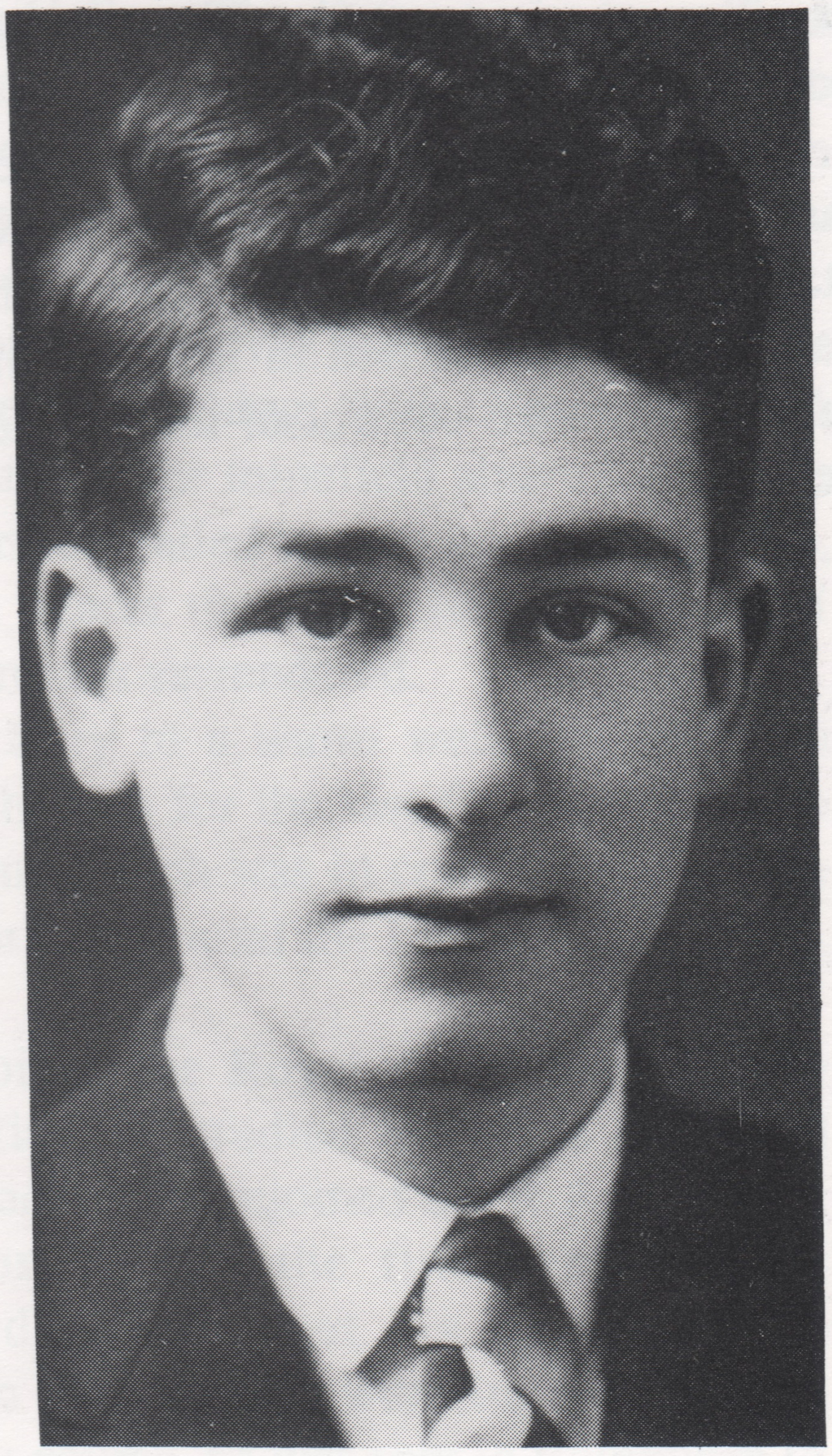
He changed his name to Keiller when he took up medicine 'for obvious reasons'. He married, Enid, an ex-WAAF, while still at Medical School; they have two children and three grand children. Frank became an Australian citizen in 1973.

He was one of those living overseas who returned to Jersey on the Liberation Anniversary in 1985, when a Reunion of over 30 Occupation escapees and their families met at the Royal Channel Islands Yacht Club. (See picture at end of book).

Peter Curwood left Jersey in late 1945 with the intention of joining the Armed Forces, but after months of waiting, and because his father wished to start up the family business again with him and his brother John, he returned in early 1946. He married in 1954 and has two daughters. In 1978, Peter and his brother assumed control of the business which has been in the family for 100 years.



Frank Killer



Peter Curwood

A photograph of their companion in their aborted seaborne attempt, Hugh La Cloche, appears in Appendix D.

CHAPTER 7

“The Franco-Jersey Alliance”

Basil Le Brun, Roger Lerouille & an unidentified Frenchman

Basil Le Brun completed his education at Victoria College in 1940 at the age of 17, and as was customary with young Jerseymen in those days with a family agricultural background, started work on his father’s farm at Beauchamp, Sion, St. John.

By August 1944, after four years of Occupation, he was, in his own words “fed up and itching to get into the action.” This commendable wish could only be achieved by escaping from the island, an idea suggested to him by a friend, Mons. Roger Lerouille, a French marine architect, an employee of a company working for the Germans, but who was, in reality and unbeknown to anyone, a member of the French Resistance.

Roger had enlisted the aid of another Frenchman, a barge skipper, to join in the venture, and, in broad daylight, they hoisted ashore a 9ft dinghy from St. Helier harbour and stored it overnight in Le Sueur’s store on the Commercial buildings, transporting it there on a cart using a false permit obtained by Roger which convinced a German guard to the extent that the latter even helped to load the boat on to the cart.

Great caution was needed, as Frank Killer and his two companions – all school contemporaries of Basil – had just been apprehended by the Germans following their unsuccessful escape attempt. The following day the boat was taken to Le Coin, La Rocque, the intended departure point, but, upon advice from other locals aware of the plan, the trio were advised that a far safer area and embarkation point would be at 'Bellair', Fauvic, the property of Mr. T.C. Bertram.

This change of venue was agreed, and Mr. Bertram Payn – another ex-College contemporary of Basil's – agreed to move the boat in his horse-drawn cart, the engine to be carried on a bicycle trailer by another volunteer.

As it was considered too risky to use the main coast road, Bertram and a fellow helper set out through the country lanes to the embarkation point. A tarpaulin covering was not large enough to completely cover the boat, and the bow was plainly visible. Nearing 'Bellair' they suddenly met two German soldiers walking in the road towards them; a few breathless moments followed, but they were not challenged, and continued on their way, being joined shortly afterwards by the trailer-born engine.

Having reached 'Bellair', the 'Fauvic Embarkation Point' system swung into action, unloading the boat and stores, and generally assisting the three escapees load and launch the boat. Basil had with him his College O.T.C. kit-bag containing a change of clothes and two English £5 notes concealed one in each sock.

At approximately 10 p.m. on 21 September, on a high tide, Basil, Roger and the French barge skipper (whose identity has never become known) set off. Bertram Payn recalls the final moments before departure; some ladies were present, and one of the Frenchmen became somewhat indignant at the time taken in the farewells, swearing in French and grumbling "this is no time for kissing, we ought to be off, otherwise we'll be caught"..

Happily, such fears were not realised, and the actual crossing was uneventful – if any such undertaking as this could be so described; suffice to say, the trio reached the Carteret area where they were picked up by some French fishermen and escorted ashore at about 6.a.m. Here they all enjoyed a hearty breakfast with a French family, before embarking in their boat and rowing down the coast to the American garrison at Coutainville.

Upon reporting to the Military authorities there, they were initially interrogated, and Roger and the barge skipper were handed over to the French Gendarmerie. Basil was taken to Bayeux for further questioning, and, after two weeks in France, left Cherbourg en route for Southampton.

Here he was interrogated by Military Intelligence; two uncles of his, one in Bournemouth and one in Oxford, both vouched as to his identity, and Basil was 'cleared' and taken to the War Office in London, where he was able to pass on useful items of intelligence to the Military authorities.

Basil's desire to 'get into the action' was finally realised when he joined the Royal Navy as a Radio Gunnery Operator. He was able to return to Jersey briefly at the end of May 1945 after the Liberation of the Island, and by the time the War was finally over in the August, he was to be found in Singapore and later in Australia, where he worked for nine months on a shore posting.

After three years service in the Navy he returned to Jersey and, like so many of his generation, spent some time re-habilitating himself with fishing and other similar less than strenuous activities, and it was when he was about 27 years old that he finally re-joined the family business.

He still lives at his birthplace in St. John, where his son Anthony has succeeded him in the farm business, and nowadays divides his time between there and his house in Normandy.

He has kept in touch with Roger over the years, and in 1985 at the time of the Reunion of escapees, Roger returned to the Island from his home at Port en Bessin, Normandy to join in the festivities, which included a row in the actual boat used in the escape; this craft can be seen today on display at the Underground Hospital at St. Peter.

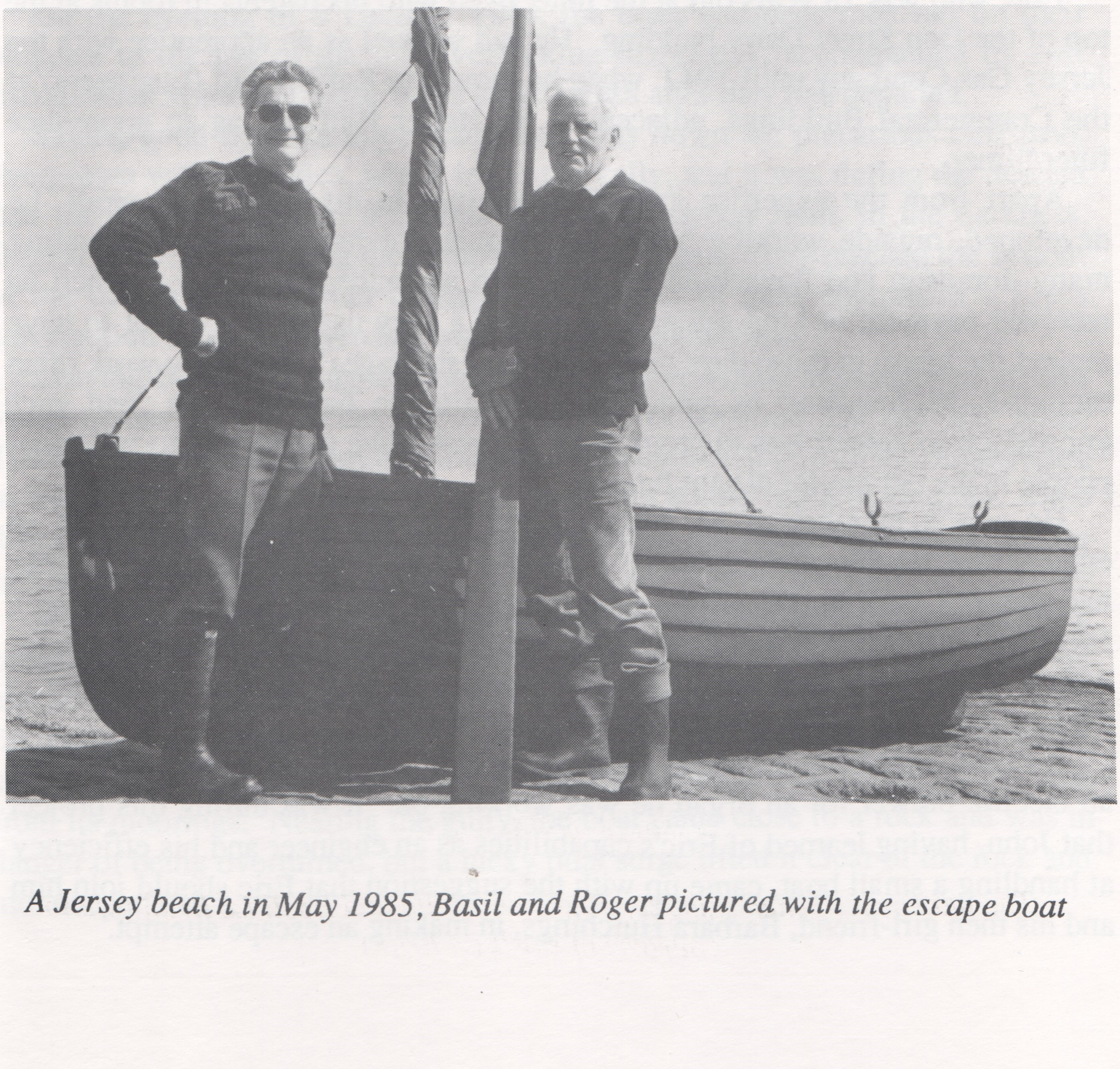
Roger Lerouille was decorated by his country for his work in the French Resistance.

Postscript.

Clarence Le Brun, Basil's father, was himself to become actively involved in the 'escape business' some five months later. (See Chapter 6 – 'Paddle Power' II).

A French beach – 22 September 1944 – local inhabitants welcome the three successful escapees

The unknown French skipper, Roger Lerouille and Basil Le Brun (photo courtesy of Basil Le Brun)



A Jersey beach in May 1985, Basil and Roger pictured with the escape boat

CHAPTER 8

"Two Lads and a Lassie"

Eric Hamon, John Langley & Barbara Hutchings

An entry in Leslie Sinel's Occupation Diary for 8 October 1944 reads:

"At night a young man and a young lady made their escape from the Island, leaving St. Martin's in a boat at about 10.30."

This item is incorrect in one particular, as there were in fact two young men in the escape party, and the following account of this successful attempt has been recalled through the eyes of Eric Hamon, the third member of the trio.

Eric, who was 18 years old at the time, lived with his parents in rooms at the top of the Don Street Dairy building. He had worked as an apprentice with the Jersey Gas Company until 1942, when he moved to Raffray Ltd (Engineers) at the Commercial Buildings, adjacent to St. Helier Harbour, as an apprentice fitter/turner.

Apart from the expertise gained on engines in his day-to-day work, he developed, outside working hours, an aptitude for repairing and renovating many domestic and household articles such as saucepans etc. for which he received payment in kind rather than cash – a very useful individual to have around the house in those days of 'Occupation shortages'. His daily work often included the handling of small boats within the harbour area, and such knowledge so gained was to prove to be of great value to him and to two other people in the not too far distant future.

He was a member of St. Mark's Church choir, and his interest as an engineering 'trouble-shooter' brought him into contact with John Langley. Eric had traced a fault in one of the organ pipes at St. Mark's, and he struck up a friendship with John, who was working on repairs to the organ at the same time, which were being undertaken by Donaldson's of Bath Street, St. Helier, a Musical business which was owned by John's family.

A casual friendship followed, John asking Eric whether the latter could make an electric blower for an organ he was working on. It was during this project that John, having learned of Eric's capabilities as an engineer and his efficiency at handling a small boat, came up with the suggestion that Eric should join him and his then girl-friend, Barbara Hutchings, in making an escape attempt.

John had done all the background planning, including obtaining an engine – a Johnson Sea-Horse Twin – from a source unknown to Eric.

The selection of a boat and point of embarkation were decided when the two young men were making a reconnaissance from a vantage point overlooking the tiny harbour of Rozel, on the North-East coast of the Island, where a number of small fishing boats were moored alongside the jetty.

From their observation point across the small bay they noticed an open boat, between 11-13 feet in length, moored against the jetty, and decided it seemed to fit the bill for their purpose; they both agreed not to look further afield, but to 'borrow' the boat from its unknown owner!

Naturally, it was not possible merely to walk on to the jetty and remove the boat, as the harbour area was under German guard day and night. They decided, therefore, that they would swim across the small bay at night, release the boat, and move it into a small gully on the East side of the bay, where they could load up the boat, pick up Barbara, and be on their way.

On the evening of 8 October 1944, the three escapees rode out on their bicycles to the top of the hill overlooking Rozel bay, accompanied by two friends who would return the bikes to St. Helier after they had departed.

Saying good-bye, the three made their way down the precarious cliff path, overgrown with brambles, which led to the gully, and it was during the descent that the first calamity of the evening occurred when John, in the darkness, slipped and fell, damaging the compass beyond repair. They reached the bottom of the cliff without further mishap with the rest of their equipment – Eric's contribution being a carrier-bag containing his sandwiches!

Leaving Barbara hiding in some bushes, the two young men stripped off and swam across the bay to the jetty – a distance of between 200 and 300 yards. The reader is reminded that this was not a midsummer 'dip' with the temperature in the '70's, but an extremely difficult swim, on a dark night in October, when discovery would mean at the least capture, and at the worst death by drowning or a bullet from a German sentry.

However, they reached the moored boat without further incident, and Eric pulled himself over the gunwale, eased the moorings fore and aft and, pushing and swimming, the two boys manoeuvred the boat across the small bay towards the gully. This action, incredibly, went completely unnoticed by the German sentry, whose silhouette had been seen by Eric when he was releasing the boat from its moorings. Nearing the gully, the boat came close to a rock and was in danger of being overturned, but a lucky tidal surge lifted it clear of the rock and into deeper water.

Having reached the gully, Eric remained in the sea, holding on to the boat to prevent it from grounding, while John went up the beach to bring down Barbara and the engine and other equipment. Moments later Barbara returned alone, saying that John had passed out through the sheer cold; she then took over from Eric in maintaining hold on the boat, while Eric went back to John who was, by then, partially recovering. The young men put on their clothes, and Eric helped John down to the boat, which was loaded up and made ready to leave; the time was about 10 p.m.

Eric then sculled the boat away from the shore for – as he recalls – "as long as my strength lasted" – a time estimated at being somewhere between $1\frac{1}{2}$ and 2 hours!

The loss of the compass added to their navigational problems, but Eric had, fortunately, received some basic but extremely useful information prior to the attempt from a local skipper, Captain Sowden, who had briefed him on a suggested course and explained the tidal patterns.

John recovered slowly, and when they considered that they were reasonably clear of the Island the outboard motor was fitted and started up. The weather deteriorated, the sea became much rougher, and both John and Barbara succumbed to 'mal de mer'; Eric was at the tiller and was kept busy bailing-out the boat, using the broken compass holder.

Between 1 and 2 o'clock in the morning, Eric became aware that there were rocks ahead, correctly guessed that they were in the area of the Ecréhous (a group of rocks situated North-East of Jersey and approximately half-way between Jersey and the French coast), and decided, as the tide was running fully, that there was the danger of hitting some unseen obstacle, and, being bereft of any basic navigational aid, decided to anchor until daylight; he threw out the anchor warp, opened up his sandwiches, and tried to catch up on some well earned sleep!

When the sun rose, Gorey Castle was still in sight, so they moved off once again in the opposite direction – towards the rising sun – and France. After about 4 hours the line of a beach came into sight, and as they neared the shore, the sea became calmer. A grey granite wall came into sight, which, when they got closer, turned out to be a harbour.

John by now had recovered from his sea-sickness, and hoisted a Union Jack they had brought with them. They rounded the small harbour, tied up at the quayside and, after their hazardous trip of some 14 hours, discovered that they had landed at Carteret, an almost 'dead-reckoning' North-East course from Rozel Bay in Jersey, a truly remarkable achievement.

Eric noticed a soldier in khaki uniform on the quay and asked him.."Who are you?"..Came the reply.."Don't you recognise the American uniform, buddy?".. The boat was hauled up on to the harbour slipway by a group of locals; it is understood it was returned to its rightful owner in Jersey after the War.

The Americans took the three escapees to Carteret town, where they were given a most welcomed meal, thence to Cherbourg by jeep, and transferred to the United Kingdom by train-ferry to Southampton. The trio were accompanied by a R.A.F. Squadron Leader who escorted them to London, where they were de-briefed by Military authorities at the War Office.

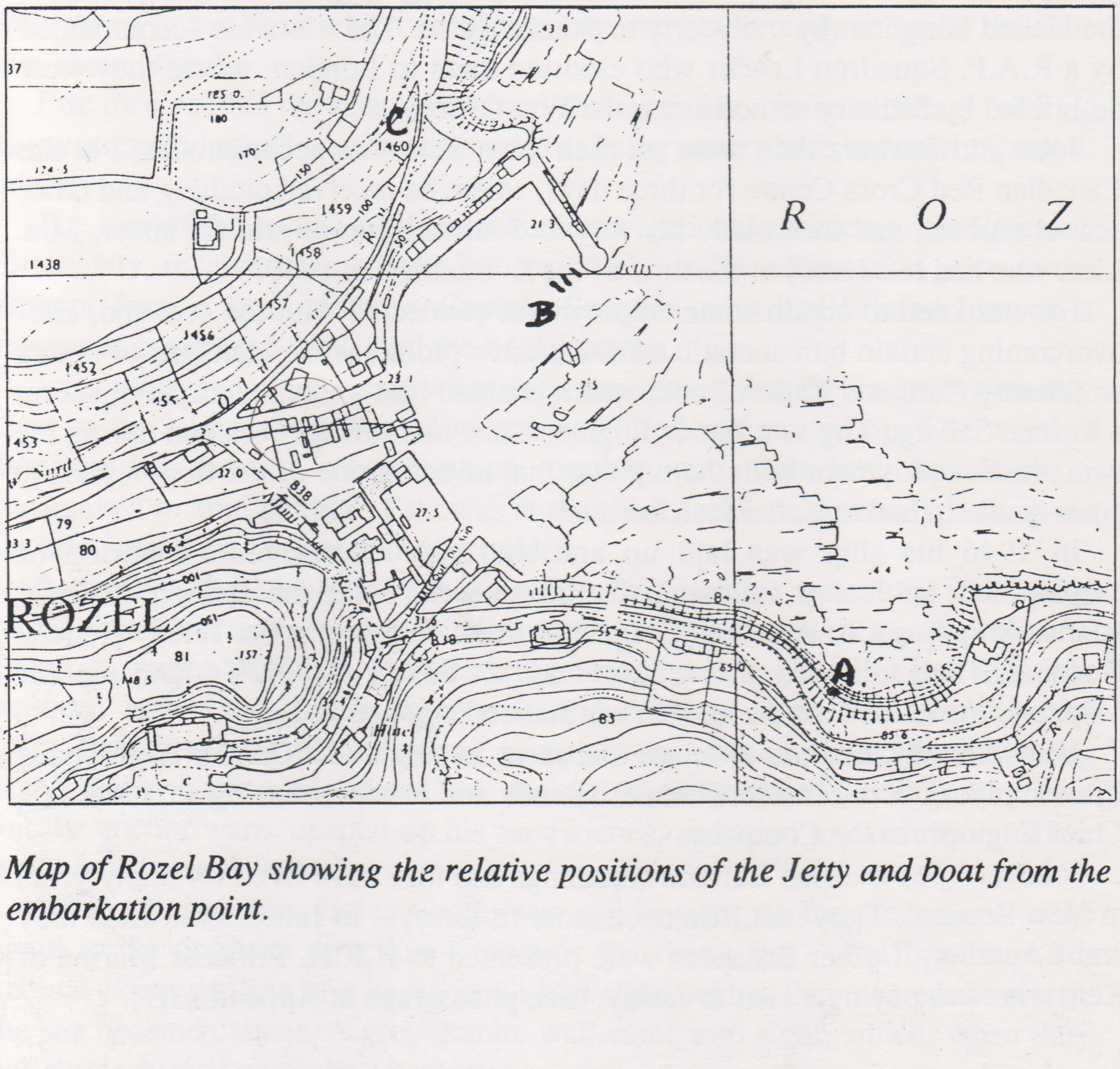
John and Barbara then went on their way. Eric was accommodated at the Canadian Red Cross Centre for three days, where he received clothing and other accoutrements, and then made his way to Southampton to join his sister, Mrs. Liot, who had left Jersey at the time of the Evacuation in 1940.

He was keen to obtain some employment connected with the sea, and, after overcoming certain bureaucratic administrative problems, he managed to obtain an Identity Card and Ration Book, which enabled him to obtain employment on a Rescue Salvage Tug as a Junior Engineer; one memorable occasion during his two years employment with the tug was that of being one of the first vessels to enter Antwerp harbour after its Liberation.

In 1946 his ship was laid up and the crew discharged. A period of employment in Jersey followed, including work with the British Channel Islands Shipping Co, and a 6 year period as an engineer at the Jersey General Hospital. Then followed an overseas contract during the 1950's with the Air Ministry Works Directorate as a Power Station Engineer in Egypt.

He eventually returned to Jersey and spent 14 years with Condor High Speed Travel, plying between the Channel Islands and France, retiring in 1988 as a Chief Engineer in the Company.

John Langley married Barbara Hutchings and they have lived for many years in New Zealand. They met Eric once more in Jersey – in June 1948, when they and a number of other Escapees were presented to H.R.H. Princess Marina of Kent who was paying a visit to Jersey. (See photograph at Appendix 'E').


37
180
170
174·5
C
1460
1459
1458
1438
21·3
Jetty
B
1457
1456
1452
1455
1453
32·0
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79
80
ROZEL
81
83
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O
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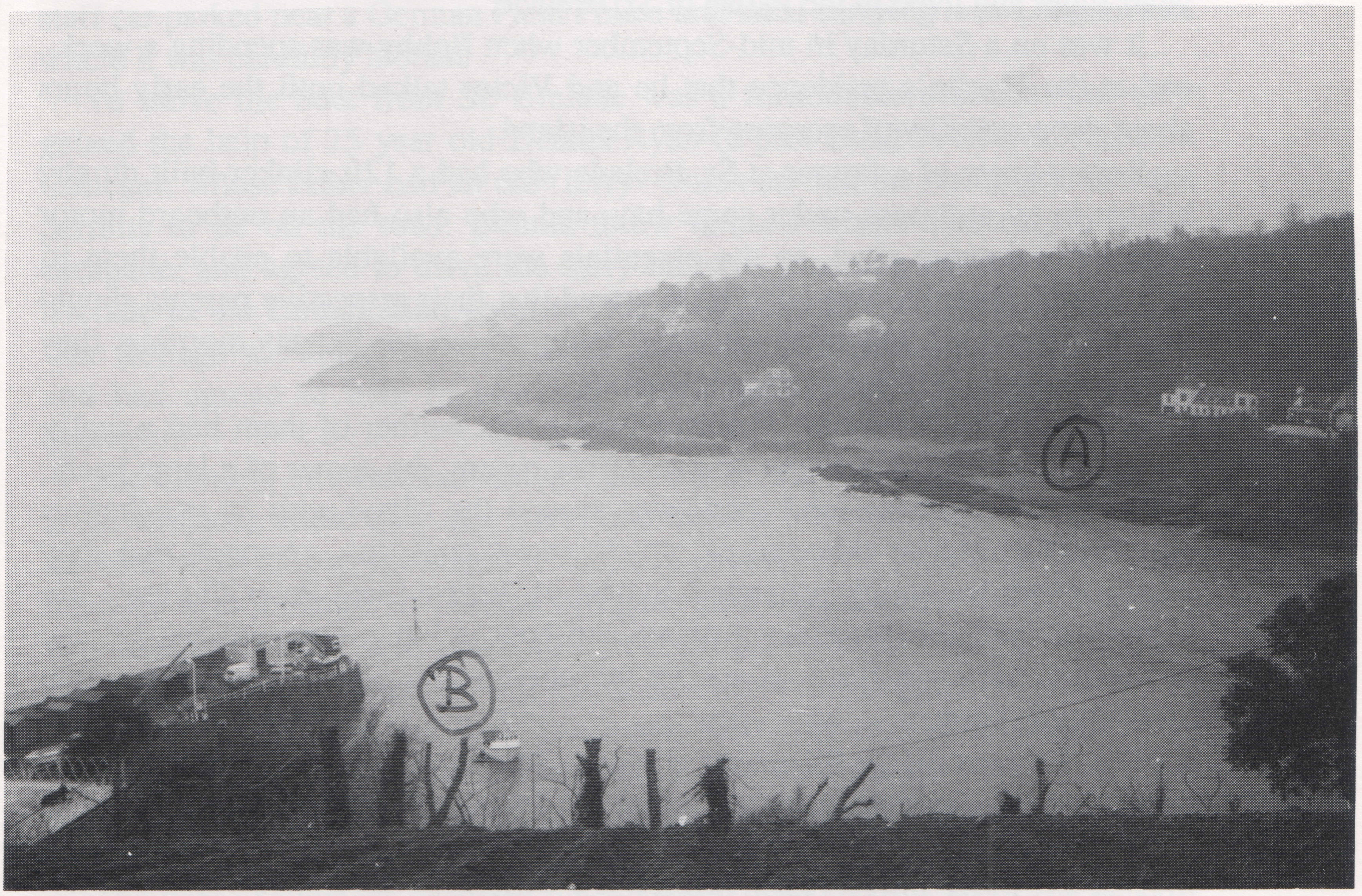
Map of Rozel Bay showing the relative positions of the Jetty and boat from the embarkation point.



Photograph overlooking the area from position C, showing the embarkation point A and the location of the boat B

CHAPTER 9

“Smooth was the Sea”

Victor Huelin, Robert Woods & Harry McFarlane

Victor Huelin and Bobby Woods both entered Victoria College, Jersey, in 1936. Both remained with their parents when the Germans occupied the island in 1940; Bobby left school in 1943 and Victor a year later.

At the time of their escape in October 1944, Victor was a little over 18 years of age, and living at Longueville Court, St. Saviour; Bobby Woods was two years older and lived in the Parish of St. Brelade.

It was on a Saturday in mid-September when Bobby was spending a weekend at the Huelin’s residence that he and Victor talked until the early hours about the possibility of escaping from the island.

Bobby knew of a farmer at St. Brelade who had a 12ft clinker-built dinghy hidden in an outhouse under some hay, and who also had an outboard motor stored in a garden shed, so the essentials were available to enable them to formulate a plan; the two boys both agreed that their respective parents should be made aware of what they intended doing, so, on the Sunday morning, they informed Victor’s father of their intentions.

After hearing them out, and discovering that neither of them had a really viable plan, Mr Huelin, being of a seafaring nature, the owner of a large yacht, and well aware of the tidal conditions around the island with its treacherous currents, fast run of tide and extremely rocky coastline, arranged that they should meet the much respected States' of Jersey pilot Peter Guiton. He instructed them on the tides, currents, and how to box a compass and he also suggested the best time of month to attempt an escape and a suitable embarkation point.

The date was set for 9 October at approximately midnight when there was a big spring tide, and the departure point chosen was Grouville bay; the idea of leaving on a spring tide was that the minimal draught of the boat would enable it to clear any of the mined beach obstacles.

They planned to row for about two hours aided by the tidal flow which would take them just east of St. Catherine's breakwater before the turn of the tide, when the currents would sweep them north-eastwards towards the

Ecréhous rocks and towards the French coast; the motor would be started up after about one hour's rowing from St. Catherine.

It was during this planning period that the two boys were pleased to welcome another person to join their efforts, Harry McFarlane, a Merchant Navy engineer, who had been stranded in Jersey since the 1940 evacuation, and was itching to get away.

Bobby then approached the farmer at St. Brelaue, and, after a great deal of haggling, managed to purchase the dinghy and the outboard motor. They left the dinghy at the farm, filling it with water in order to seal the clinker-built planking; the motor was wrapped in sacking and brought back to Longueville Court in a small trailer towed behind Victor's bicycle, where the two boys stripped it down and gave it a thorough servicing, together with another engine owned by Mr. Huelin which they would take as a 'back-up'. Petrol for the journey was obtained by the simple process of syphoning a quantity out of a staff car parked near a German Field Police unit aand carrying it to Longueville, where it was carefully hidden.

To move the boat from St. Brelade was a formidable problem, but they gained the help of 25 year old Dennis Ryan (a past Head Prefect of Victoria College), whose father had an old lorry which carried the necessary German permits to be on the road. Dennis threw himself whole-heartedly into the escapade, and agreed to drive the lorry himself, planning the route from St. Brelade to the embarkation point at Grouville, which was a field adjacent to 'The Cottage' at Fauvic, the property of Colin Marie, who had been approached and had agreed to help in any way to ensure the smooth running of the operation.

The morning of 9 October arrived, and Victor and Bobby cycled to the farm at St. Brelade, where they met Harry and Dennis with the lorry. They loaded the boat on to the lorry, covered it with a tarpaulin, threw their bicycles on top, together with a couple of ladders and paint pots etc., dressed themselves in a way to suggest they were 'decorators', and set off in broad daylight on a route which took them through the middle of St. Helier to Longueville, where they picked up the motors and fuel, and made their way to Fauvic; all this was accomplished without incident, apart from a few worrying moments when they were temporarily halted by a German Field policeman on point duty directing traffic at Snow Hill, in the middle of St. Helier.

The next excitement occurred when Dennis tried to back the lorry into the field at Fauvic; the steering lock on the vehicle could not take the turn in one attempt, so it had to be reversed back on to the road for a second try. During thisoperation, a German staff car containing a German officer came along the road and was held up while Dennis frantically manoeuvred the lorry; the officer didn't seem to be worrying very much – unlike the lorry's occupants (!) – and looked on with amusement until the vehicle was successfully backed into the field; the boys, breathing sighs of relief, waved at the car to say "thank you for waiting", and, much to their surprise, the German officer smiled and waved back!

Assisted by Colin Marie, the boat was unloaded still camouflaged with the tarpaulin and ladders etc. Dennis bade his farewell and drove off with the lorry, and the others all headed for their respective homes on their bicycles to collect what food they were taking and to take leave of their families.

Victor recalls a very poignant parting with his parents before leaving in company with his 16 year old brother, Lewis, who accompanied him on their bicycles to Colin Marie's house, where they all assembled at 10 p.m.; they sat around talking and drinking ersatz coffee supplied by Mrs. Marie until the time came for departure.

The journey.

The boat had to be moved from its hiding place and carefully lowered down the sea wall to the beach below. An incident occurred while this was being done, when Harry suddenly tripped and disappeared over the wall; this movement was accompanied by muffled Anglo-Saxon cursings from the darkness below which, according to Victor, rendered the night sky a vivid shade of blue! It was then revealed that Harry suffered from 'night blindness', an unforeseen malady which, at that critical point of the operation, was hardly anticipated; fortunately, Harry was unhurt, and as a few moments of silence produced no hostile reaction, the boat was slowly lowered on to the beach, carried the few yards from the sea wall to the sea, which was as smooth as a millpond, and duly launched. The escapees embarked, having loaded the equipment, Victor being carried out on his brother Lewis's shoulders to avoid getting his feet wet, and, bidding their 'farewells', the trio were on their way; the time was between 11 pm and midnight.

Following Pilot Guiton's instructions, they rowed for a couple of hours before using the motor; Harry steered with an oar fixed in the stern rowlock, taking his bearings from the compass which was placed in a biscuit tin with a torch inside and the smallest hole in the lid to view the compass needle.

The journey itself was completely without incident – the sea was remarkably friendly and smooth, although it seemed to them an age before they heard the waves breaking on the French coast.

Being some three hours before dawn, they decided to wait until daylight before landing, and took the opportunity of eating what food they had brought with them.

Daylight came, they raised a Union Jack in the stern of the boat, and now, having fitted the second engine, motored down the French coastline using up the last reserves of petrol; they found a small fishing harbour into which they 'chugged', tired, but as happy as sandboys, to be greeted by two American G.I's. The journey had taken them about twelve hours to accomplish.

The trio were taken by jeep to an American H.Q. where they were interrogated by an American Colonel, who was eventually satisfied as to their 'bona-fides'; they supplied him with intelligence regarding German dispositions, arms and fortifications that had been collected during their days of waiting and which had been put in a tin box attached to a large stone, which, if they had been apprehended by the Germans, they could have jettisoned into the sea.

American hospitality being what it is, besides being fed well, Victor recalls Harry being continually offered cigarettes – never a single packet, but always a carton of 100 at a time; with these cartons sticking out of his pockets and tucked in his shirt, Harry looked like a walking advertisement for 'Lucky Strike'.

A couple of days later, they were driven to Cherbourg and handed over to the RAF Embarkation Unit for more questioning, and the next day they crossed over to Southampton – more questioning – then, finally to the War Office in London for a last 'de-briefing' before being 'cleared'.

Harry went on his way, and Victor and Bobby joined the Army, together with another old school colleague of theirs, Alex Renouf, who had himself escaped from Jersey a day or so after their venture and who they had met up with at the Channel Islands Refugee Centre in London.

Bobby Woods pursued a successful career in the Army, before retiring with the rank of Major in the 3rd King's Own Hussars and returning to Jersey where he farmed for several years before his untimely death.

After initial training in Glasgow, Victor served time in the ranks as an N.C.O. in the Beds. and Herts. Regiment, eventually being commissioned into the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, and saw post-war service in India, Japan, and Malaya. After demobilisation, he returned to Jersey for a short while before settling eventually in Kent, where he was employed for 24 years by a well known aluminium company, retiring in the post of Sales Manager in August 1990. He married a war-time W.A.A.F. and they raised a son and a daughter; unhappily, his wife died in 1984. He makes periodic visits to Jersey to renew friendships of yester-year, which he finds both very nostalgic and rewarding.

Victor Huelin

Robert Woods

No photograph of Harry MacFarlane has come to light

CHAPTER 10

"Success and Tragedy"

David Blandin, Donald Le Lievre, René Robert, Patrick Smith, Valentine Goudre, & Peter Desvergez

Douglas Le Marchand, Michael X. Neil, Ken Collins & George La Marquand

Following the successful escapes recorded in the previous two Chapters, the nights of 9 and 10 October saw two further attempts made by the above groups, and, although there was a connection between both parties as regards basic planning, a last minute change in the hour of departure was to result in success for one group, and a tragic ending for the other.

Donald Le Lievre and Michael Neil, at 16 the youngest member of the group, were friends at school, and in the summer of 1944 were employed as apprentice-mechanics in a garage in St. Helier; David Blandin was also a friend of Donald; Ken Collins, who was David's cousin, worked at a farm at Fauvic owned by his uncle Peter Jehan, while George Le Marquand, another pal of David, was an apprentice carpenter/joiner.

As with other groups in the Island, the idea of escape from Jersey was discussed between them and plans formulated. David managed to find a suitable boat – 12ft in length with a 4'6" beam – owned by a Mr Perchard and hidden in a shed opposite Pontac garage in La Rue de Causie, an ideal position, being only yards away from the sea shore across the St. Clement coast road. An engine was obtained from a Mr. Huson of Samarès Lane, who bartered his 'Seagull' outboard motor for a pre-war Renault car; this engine was taken back to the Cleveland garage in St. Helier, where it was overhauled by garage mechanic, Peter Desvergez, another member of the escape party.

It became clear that a second boat was required to accommodate the escape party of ten, and Douglas Le Marchand and Donald managed to trace one hidden under some hay in a loft at Edward Langlois' farm at Le Catillon, Longueville. This craft was a flat bottomed hydroplane motor boat which Mr.

Langlois had raced pre-war in local waters, and he agreed to make it available to the escapees together with the large outboard motor.

Planning that six would travel in the boat at Pontac and four in the motor boat, it was agreed beforehand that both boats would leave on the same night – the 10 October – albeit from different embarkation points, but, on the advice of David Blandin's uncle, Len Le Cuirot, (who had helped many escapees, including the one recorded in Chapter 6),t hat the weather would deteriorate within 24 hours, the 'Pontac party' made a quick decision to leave that very night – 9 October. Such was the speed of this decision that Michael Neil's party could not obtain the petrol they needed in time; the 24 hr. delay, we shall see, proved disastrous for the latter group.

At about 9.30 pm on the night of 9 October, the six members of the Pontac group assembled at La Causie Lane, carried the boat across the main road, using the oars to support the weight and minimise the noise, and on to the beach.

It was low tide, and they had to carry the boat and engine through the various gullies until they reached the tide line; where they launched the boat at about 10 pm without incident. They rowed out against the tide, and, when sufficiently out to sea, attempted to start the engine, which, although it fired well enough, kept stopping. They, therefore, had to row the whole way; six people in a relatively small boat meant there was very little freeboard, and they had bale out the sea water constantly, but, as fortune would have it the weather was calm and benign. (Unbeknown to them, Victor Huelin and his two companions were sharing in this good fortune that very same night, as mentioned in the previous Chapter).

After some 18½ hours rowing, and an incident-free journey, they made landfall at 4.30 pm the following afternoon – 10 October – at the small French port of Montmartin-sur-mer, where they were taken by an American jeep patrol and handed over to the French Gendarmerie. They were made a great fuss of by the locals, who plied them with food, and put them up in a local hotel.

After interrogation at Granville, they were taken to Cherbourg, thence across the Channel to Southampton then on to London, where they were de-briefed at the War Office and where they handed over a batch of letters they had brought with them from Islanders who had relatives in the U.K.

So much for this happy and successful endeavour, but what of the second party of Michael Neil, Ken Collins, George Le Marquand and Douglas Le Marchand? Ken had been due to travel in the first party with his cousin, but as that boat was at its optimum compliment of six persons, he was put into the second craft.

They had moved the boat to the Fauvic area by lorry a day or so before – driver unknown – and had hidden it near the Bertram property at 'Bellair' under one of the many piles of drying seaweed (vraic), a harvest from the sea which provides local farmers with an excellent fertiliser, and, which gave the escape party, a natural hiding place.

Some time after midnight on 10 October at high water, the boat was launched; amongst those helping was Ken's uncle, Peter Jehan, and with Ken and Douglas sitting in the front of the craft and Michael and George at the rear, they started paddling out into the Bay of Grouville.

As the moon rose, the weather, from its tranquil state 24 hours earlier, had changed very much for the worst. Even under the best of weather conditions, with four inexperienced people in a boat completely inadequate for such a journey – flat bottomed, heavily weigted at the stern and with only very little freeboard – the trip was fated from the start.

About three miles out they found themselves battling against a strong current and a heavy swell, a combination which was not only starting to swamp them, but also to force them in a northerly direction . Their efforts to start the heavy motor proved fruitless, because when one of them attempted to start the motor, the craft became too heavy and the waves washed over the stern, flooding the engine and rendering it useless.

The current by now had a steady grip on the hapless party, sweeping them past Gorey Castle, and fearing they would be taken around St. Catherine's Bay and swept around to the north of the island, they put all their strength into paddling out of the current, hoping they could make a landfall in Anne Port Bay just north of Gorey; this they managed after a tremendous physical and effort.

The approaches to this beach and, indeed, to many other open areas of Jersey coastline, were defended by mines affixed to the top of tank traps, in anticipation by the Germans of a possible Allied assault from the sea.

Knowing of the danger ahead, the quartet philosophically wished each other "Good luck" – and "Goodbye", and, paddling the boat towards the shore, they were lucky to ride on a wave through the beach defences, which, on the receding tide they could see, scraping the side of the obstacles, which were laid in two lines, until they broke through, miraculously unscathed, and beached the boat at about 5 am. The beach appeared to be deserted, and the only sound was the moaning of the wind and the noise of the surf on the sand.

Amazed at their luck in surviving the past three hours at sea, they decided to hide their equipment and the boat under cover of some bushes covering part of the sea wall some 50 yards or so from their landing place. They managed to conceal the equipment in the thick bracken together with the engine which they had removed from the boat.

After completing this operation without interruption, they returned to the boat, and were starting to carry it up the beach, when it all happened....

A Verey light suddenly went up lighting the whole beach, accompanied by sounds of activity coming from the slipway leading down to the beach from the road. The light went out, and a stream of bullets buzzed around the stranded party, who all ducked behind cover of the boat. Michael found he was crouched behind one of his friends whose face was turned towards the side of the boat, and Ken was lying on top of the same individual's legs. A second Verey light was sent up accompanied by further shots, and tracer bullets were seen to pass overhead, and the odd impact was felt on the boat itself.

A challenge in German rang out, and, realising that the situation was hopeless, the boys shouted, stood up and put up their hands in surrender. Only three of the four rose, because Douglas, the one Michael had hidden close to behind the boat, had been killed by one of the shots that had hit and penetrated the side of the boat.

The Germans had formed a semi-circle around the boat; an officer approached and, having summed up the situation, motioned to the boys to carry their dead companion's body to the sea wall, where, later, it was picked up by ambulance and taken to St. Helier.

The commotion on the beach had caused a local youngster, Vernon Bonhomme by name, and a friend of Ken who lived in a small cottage opposite the slipway to the beach to open his door just as the trio were being taken away; Ken shouted to him "Let my parents know we are O.K." – a message which, it was confirmed later, was duly passed on.

The three were taken to an nearby guard-house, and then transported to Gloucester Street prison, where they were separated.

The next day they were interrogated, and then awaited their Court Martial which took place on 26 October, when George was sentenced to 12 months in prison, Michael and Ken to 10 months; Edward Langlois, who had supplied the boat was fined 500RM and spent 5 months in jail, being released on 29 March 1945. The fated trio remained in custody until the Liberation in May 1945.

The funeral of young Douglas Le Marchand was held at 9.15 a.m. on 16 October, and the following warning by the Germans appeared in the Jersey Evening Post that day:

"Between 5 and 6 o'clock on the morning of 11 October the commander of a patrol in the eastern part of the Island noticed a dark, moving object on the beach about 250 yards from the coast. In the flare of a Verey light which was sent up it was possible to make out four or five people who were busy with a boat and who took cover from the flare of the light. As no answer was given to a challenge and the persons tried to escape, they were fired at. A civilian was killed and the other three were captured and arrested. They proved to be local young men who were trying to escape from the Island."

"Attention is again drawn to the notice by the Fortress Commandant of 20 September 1944, giving warning against leaving the Island. Anyone aiding an escape, such as supplying a boat to be taken by lack of precaution, is also liable to punishment. Anyone going on the beaches round the coast during the darkness of night is playing with his life. He risks being fired upon without warning."

So ended a tragic episode in the escape sagas of the Occupation, and the only one on record where a local inhabitant had been directly killed by a member of the German Forces ... .

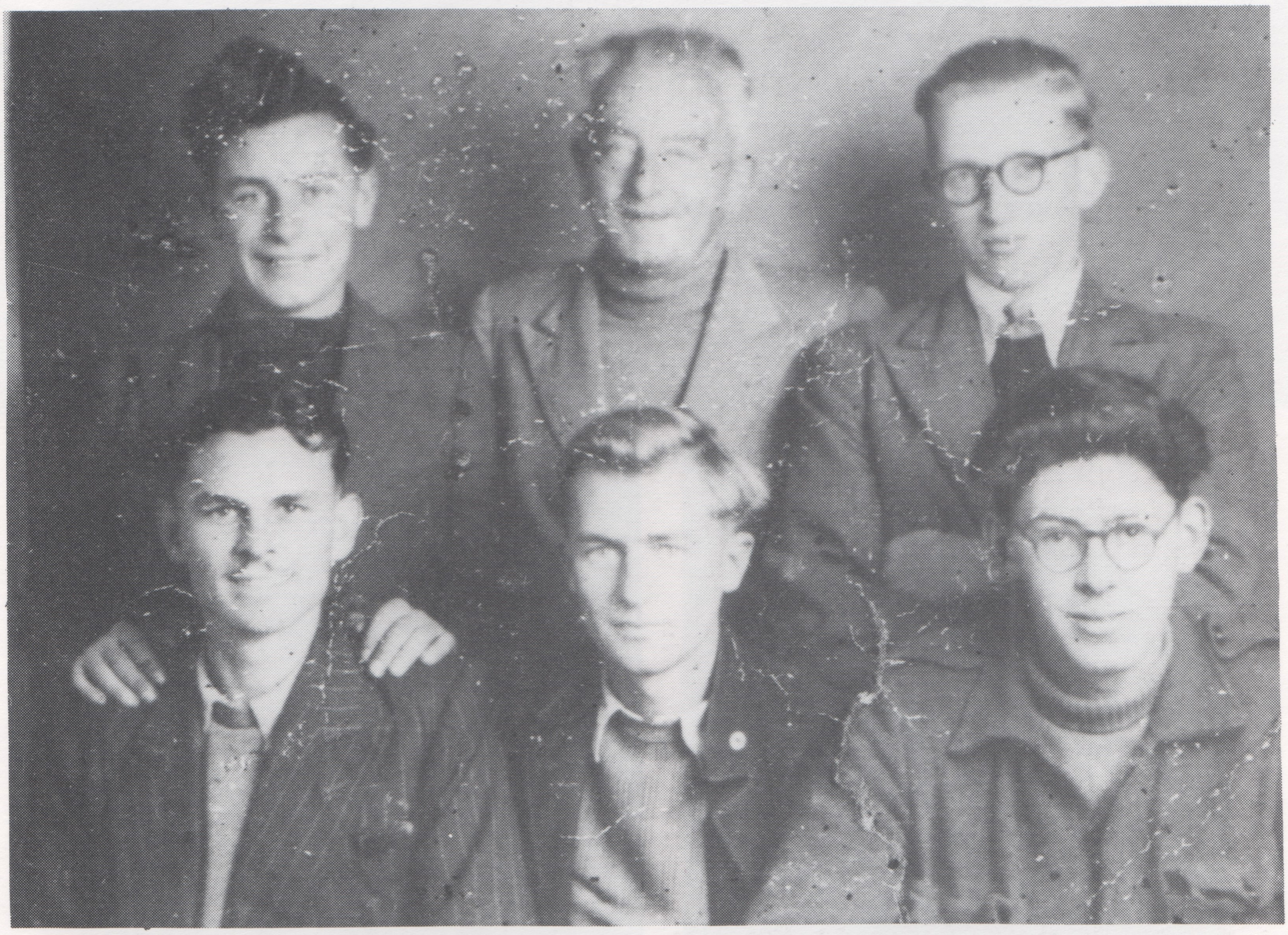
Postscript.

After the War, Neil moved to the U.K. where he continued his trade in the car industry until 1964, when he joined the Pearl Insurance Co; in 1971 he returned to Jersey with that Company. In 1984, when he took over Samarès Stores, until his retirement in 1989.

Ken Collins joined the Royal Navy for 2 years post war as an Electrical/Instruments Air Mechanic, and, upon his demobilisation entered the Civil Service in April 1951 as an Immigration Officer, retiring on 1 April 1991 after 39 years service.

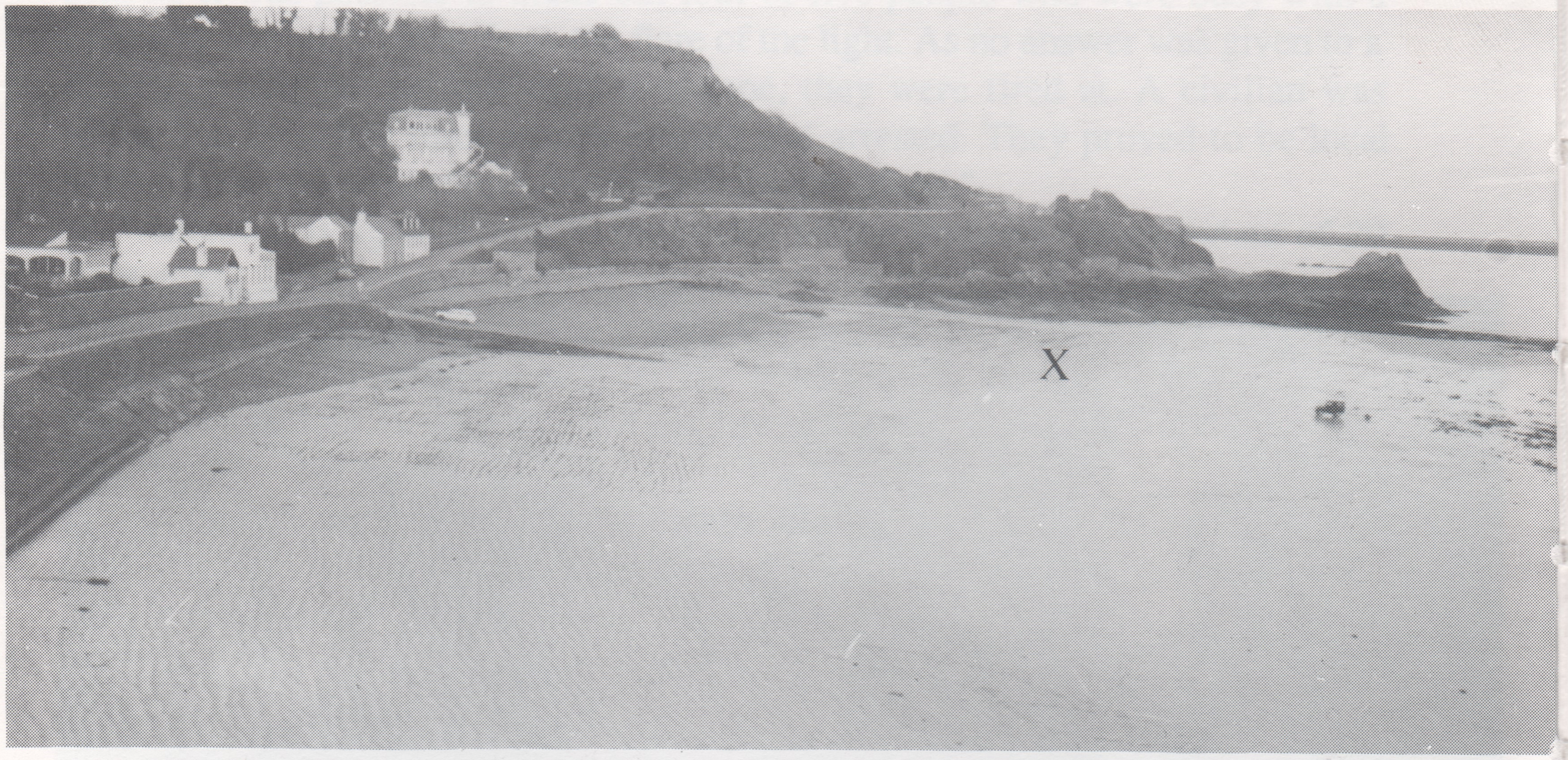
George Le Marquand kept a fascinating diary during his imprisonment, recorded in a notebook which had been smuggled into Gloucester Street by his relatives. One particular entry in George's diary of great interest was written by Frank Killer on 6 February 1945, the very day he made his successful escape from the prison (see Chapter 6 and Appendix 'B'). George also, together with Peter Noel, designed two scrolls containing the signatures of many fellow political prisoners. (See Chapter 14 and Appendix 'C').

In August 1945, George joined the Parachute Regiment for 3 years which included, in 1947, service in Palestine; he returned to Jersey on demobilisation, and re-entered the building trade.

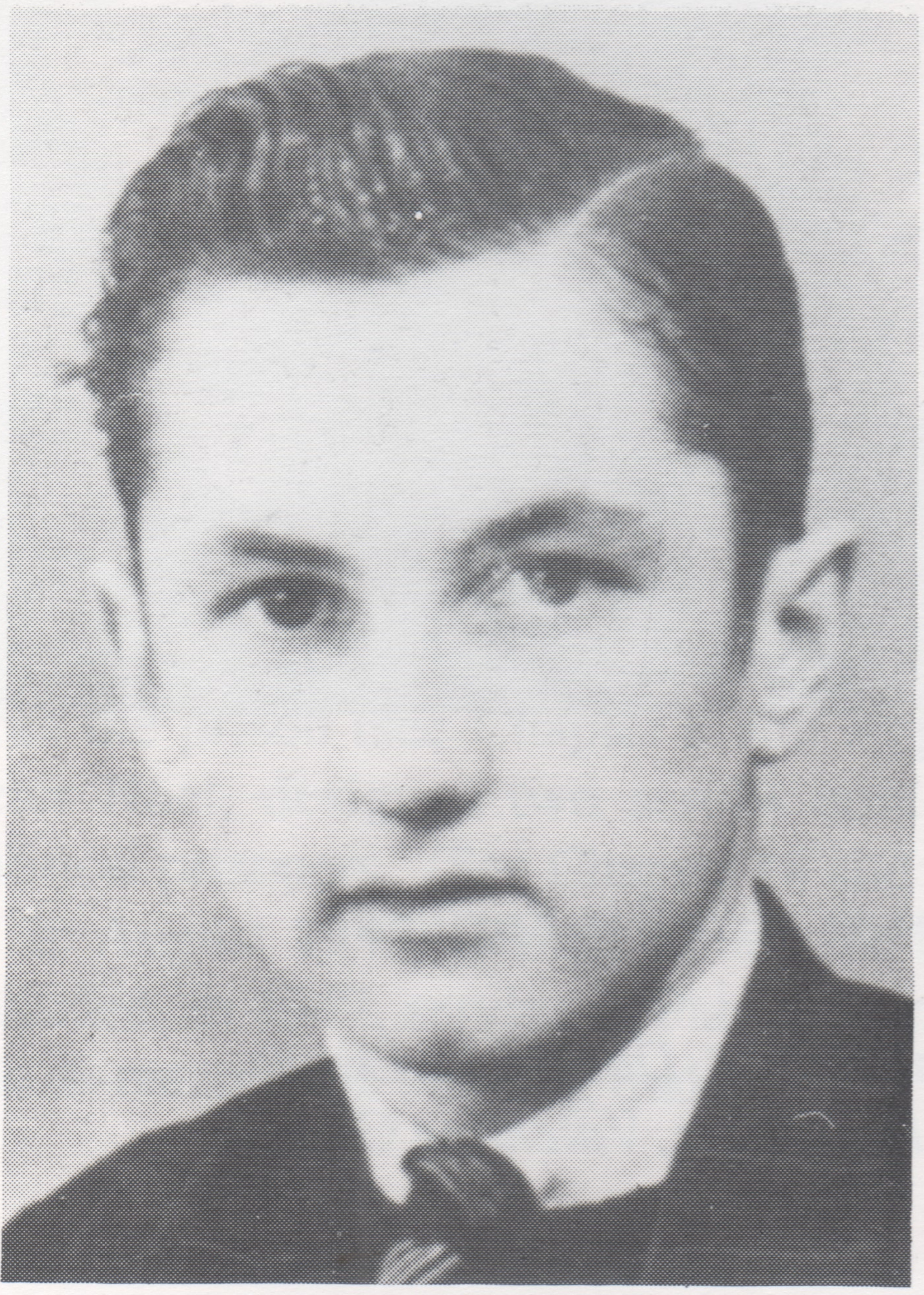


The successful six soon after their arrival in England

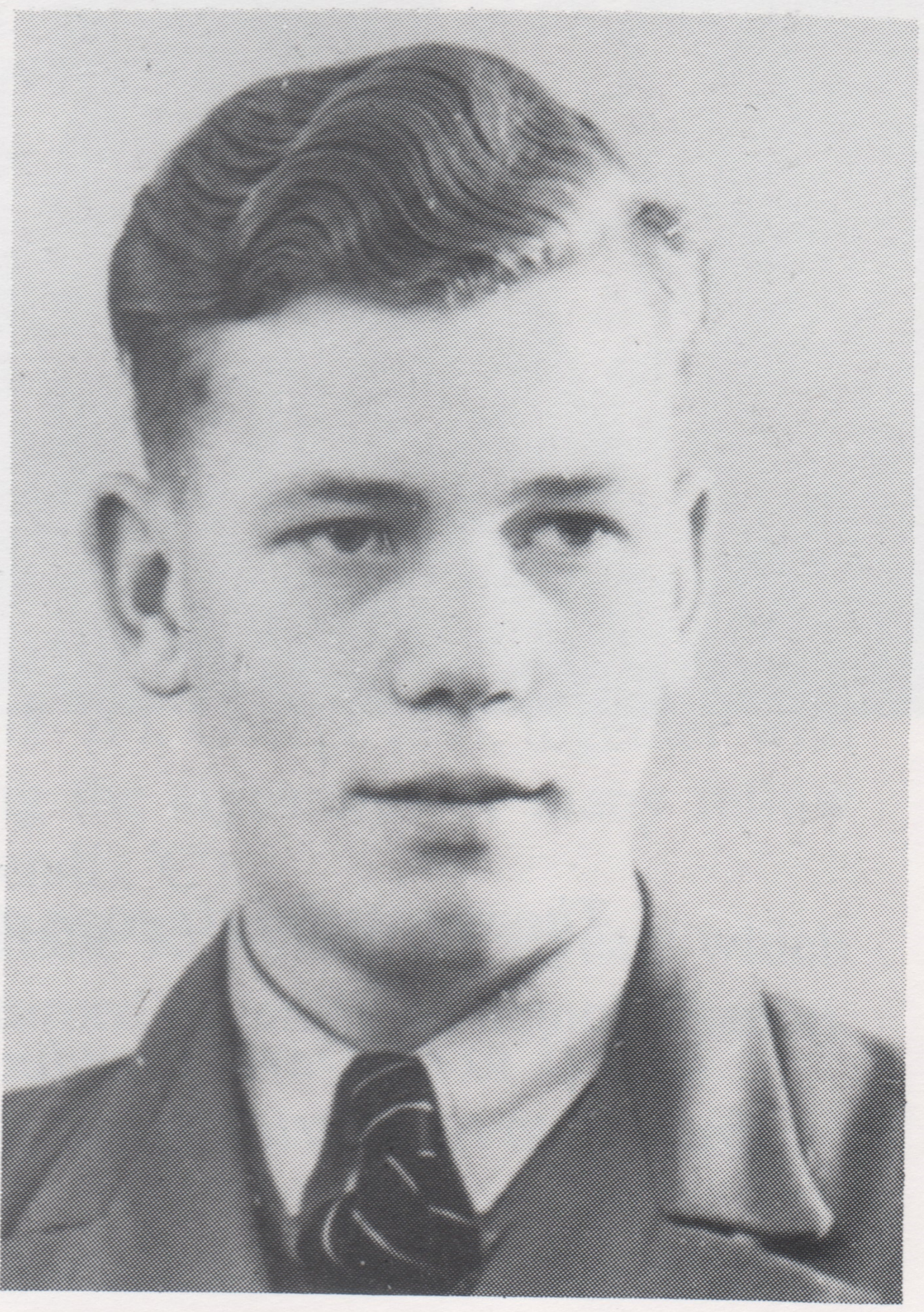
back (l. to r.) David Blandin, René Robert, Donald Le Lievre
front (l. to r.) Patrick Smith, Peter Desvergez, Valentine Goudre



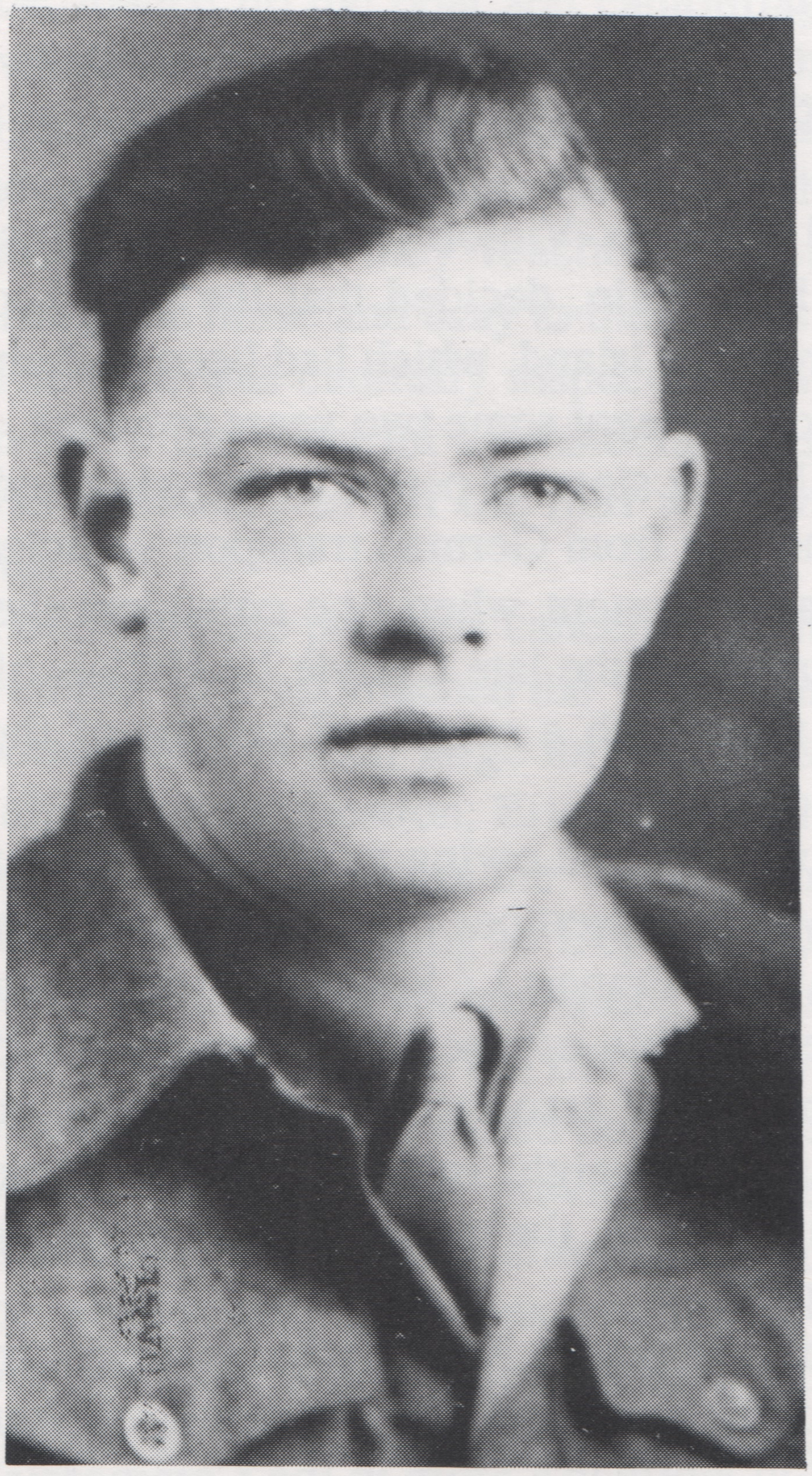
Anne Port Bay – a recent photograph with and X marking the landing point



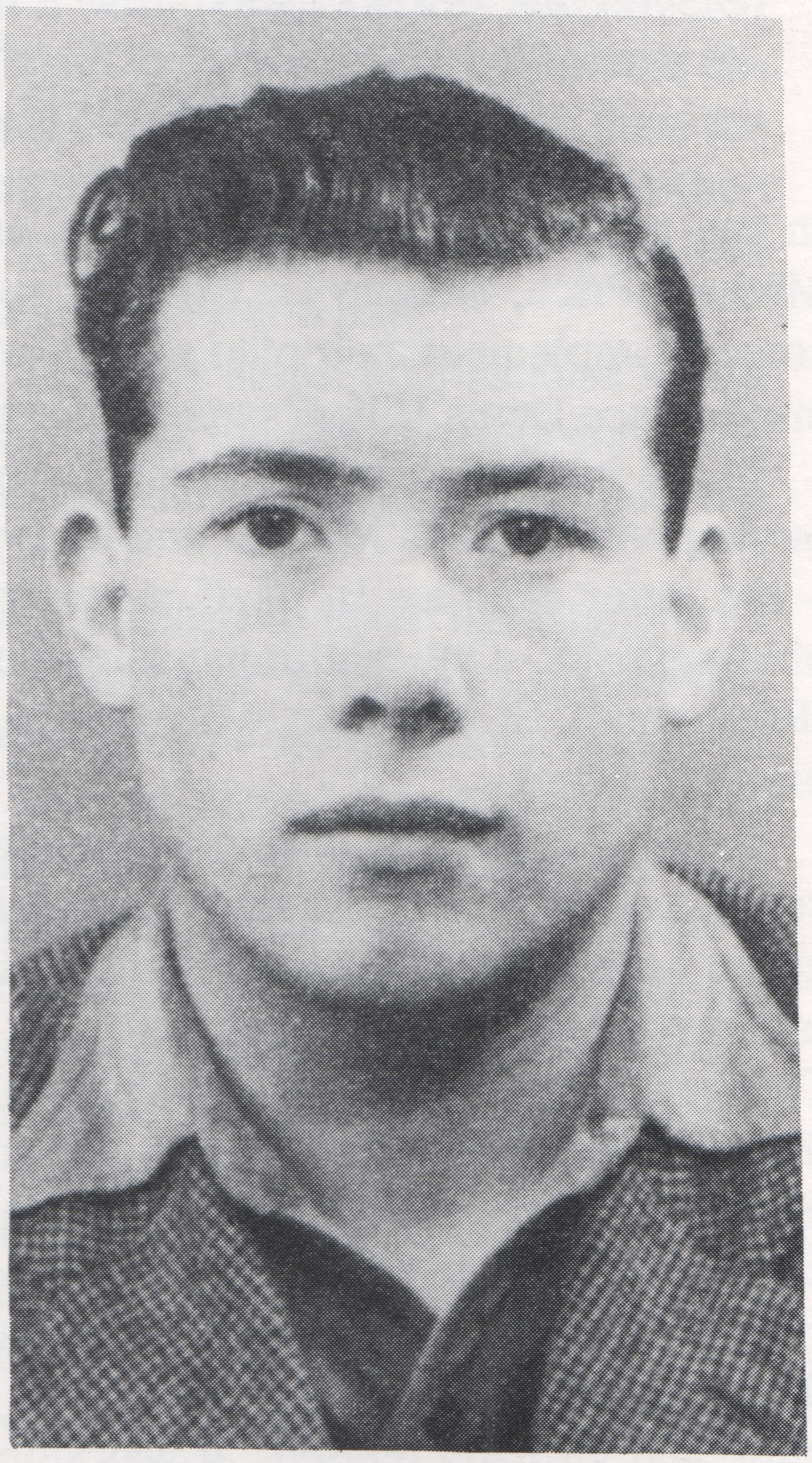
Douglas Le Marchand (aged 19, shot)



Michael X. Neil (aged 16, captured)



George Le Marchand (aged 18, captured)



Ken Collins (aged 18, captured)

CHAPTER 11

“Five is a Crowd”

Kenneth Parris, Michael Price, George Le Couteur, Eric Prain
&
Francis Le Sueur

In the autumn of 1944 Ken Parris and three ex-Victoria College students, Michael Price, George Le Couteur and Eric Prain, decided that the time had come to implement their plan of escape from the island, which had been in their minds since Denis Vibert’s magnificent achievement some two years previous.

In the interim, they had gradually built up a store of petrol by begging and buying on the Black Market, and by syphoning from German transport vehicles – the latter exercise in itself no mean achievement when one considers the obvious risks. One additional source came from the late Carlyle Le Gallais of ‘Roselands’, St. Saviour, who supplied them with a couple of gallons of the precious liquid.

A possible attempt during September was aborted owing to adverse weather conditions, so it was planned to leave in early November. In late October, the group were approached about taking with them Francis Le Sueur, who had been in hiding from the Germans since his remarkable escape from custody on 25 October. (See Chapter 4). Apart from the risk of associating with someone on the German ‘Wanted’ list, and the additional weight in a boat barely large enough to accommodate four, let alone five people, the quartet agreed to take a chance and include Francis in the escape party.

The boat to be used had been imported to Jersey by Ken’s father just prior to the Occupation; it was 15’ long with a 5’6” beam and 2’9” in depth, clinker built, and virtually unused. It was stored in Norman's Store in the Commercial Buildings in compliance with German regulations, so initial action was taken to have it moved to a 'safe' store in James' Street, owned by Mr. E. Pirouet, a corn merchant; this part of the operation was carried out successfully, but not without attendant risks.

Ken's father was head brewer at Ann Street Brewery, and arrangements were made to borrow the company's horse-drawn dray to move the boat; a friend, Dennis Poignard, whose family were sheltering Francis Le Sueur after his escape from prison, volunteered to drive the horse and dray.

On a fine evening early in September – in anticipation of the attempt which, in the event, had to be aborted – the removal party set off from the brewery stables for the Commercial Buildings at about 7 p.m. On arrival, it was possible to drive the horse and dray inside the store and close the doors facing the quay. Some members of the party remained on guard outside, while the others went inside, loaded up the boat and camouflaged it with potato barrels and covered the whole load with a secure tarpaulin. The route to James Street was across the Weighbridge area, a very open space facing the Pomme d'Or Hotel then the Headquarters of the German Navy, and through the streets of St. Helier to their destination, which they reached without incident, unloading the boat and returning the horse and dray to the stables sometime after 8 p.m.

The boat was carefully inspected at Mr. Pirouet's store, and because it had been out of the water for a considerable time some of the seams had opened, and it was necessary to fill the hull with water, which eventually tightened the seams.

Following the previous cancellation, it was planned to leave the Island on 3 November. Eric approached the Wakeham's of Bashford Nurseries, Longueville, to borrow one of their large lorries – this was agreed – no questions asked; on the afternoon in question, Eric brought the lorry to James' Street from there to what was to be known as the 'Fauvic Embarkation Point', the property at 'East Lynne' Fauvic, belonging to Deputy W.J. Bertram, a risky journey of some 3 miles or so. This was accomplished without undue incident, despite the fact that one of the potato barrels fell off the lorry during its journey through St. Helier. The boat was hidden in a shed under a pile of straw. A 2 stroke inboard engine – new and unused – had previously been tested and found to be working satisfactorily. The weather unfortunately deteriorated, and the attempt again had to be abandoned; the gales continued to blow for several days, but by 9 November there was a noticeable easing off, and, as the weather was fair on the afternoon of 10 November, it was decided to leave that night; the escapees arrived at 'East Lynne' just after 6 p.m., and at 7.30 p.m. the boat was taken across the coast road to the top of the sea wall, where it was lowered on to the beach.

The Departure.

In a post-Occupation interview with the 'Jersey Evening Post', the late Deputy W.J. Bertram recalls that evening ...

... "We had no end of a job with the boat; it was a very heavy one and we had to take it through my fields into the lane opposite 'Bellair' (the property of his cousin Mr T.C. Bertram, who himself was much involved with the escape attempts from Fauvic – see later Chapter). "Having crossed the main road and over the rough common-land, we had to go down some steps and about 500 yards on the beach – then come back for the petrol and stores. That night there were many of us on the job, including Miss Daphne McCann, who worked like a heroine carrying petrol cans and other things up and down the beach." It is of interest to note that another of the 'helpers' was Roy Mourant, who was to leave himself from the same point within twenty-four hours (See next Chapter).

The plan was to row the boat out for the first two to three miles and then start the inboard motor; in order to minimise noise, the exhaust outlet had been altered and fixed below the water-line and sealed with a cork bung.

At 8 p.m. they got away from the beach and rowed out quickly for a mile or so and then attempted to start the engine; to their general dismay they discovered that sometime during the process of getting the boat over the sea wall and on to the beach by means of a wooden chute, the bung had become dislodged and the motor, in consequence, was full of sea-water, and quite useless.

With five well-built men aboard, the freeboard was only a matter of five inches or so, and the danger of being swamped was only too evident. Months of risk in painstakingly accumulating 17 gallons of precious petrol came to naught when, in order to lighten the load in the boat, it was jettisoned into the sea. Luckily, they managed to assemble and erect a simple lug-sail cobbled out of a bamboo fishing rod and a piece of canvas, and, with Ken at the tiller and Michael jammed in tight right up in the bow with an old O.T.C. compass, they headed in the general direction of France.

Their original intention had been to try and reach Carteret – a mere sixteen miles away – but, owing to the fiasco with the engine, they were completely at the mercy of the wind and the tide. The weather was poor; they had left in the aftermath of a seasonal gale and there was a heavy swell and a cold wind; there were no stars or moon to steer by, and all suffered from acute sea-sickness. There was no bailer in the boat, so in the end they had to bend over and bail with a tin mug into a bucket, throwing the contents over the side – an action which only accelerated the feeling of 'mal de mer'.

Between 3 and 4 a.m. they caught a glimpse of the French coast, and heard the sound of broken surf on Les Iles Chausey; they decided to drop anchor and wait until daylight; this they managed to do after much difficulty untangling the anchor rope; they all recall it being a rather uncanny and uncomfortable feeling riding at anchor , as there was a lot of swell and the boat was rising and falling some fifteen to twenty feet at a time.

When it became light at about 7.30 am, they were able to ascertain their position, which to say the least was providential, as, ahead of them was a long sand bank and on their port side a little over 100 yards distant was a line of rocks which extended across the water from the sand bank; had they progressed a further 200 yards they surely would have come to grief.

It was a dullish morning as Ken rowed them out of the anchorage away from the rocks into the open sea. Observing the Sénéquet lighthouse to the north of their position, they raised the sail and moved down the coast on a southerly course towards Granville.

The wind was still from the north-west blowing them shorewards, and, with the waves increasing in size and height, they were eventually forced to make a landing at the nearest suitable spot; the surf drove them towards the beach, and they made a successful landfall in about five feet of water at 10.30 a.m. at Les Salines, a position immediately west of Bricqueville, near Bréhal, thus ending their 14½ hour sea journey.

The tide was at low water and they had landed close to a large sand bank at the mouth of an inlet. The actual coastline was some distance away, and, as there appeared to be no sign of life, it was decided that Francis – who spoke French like a native – and Eric should go and seek assistance.

This reconnaissance proved fruitful, as they came across two farmers, Mons. Georges Constantine and his son-in-law Joseph Fremin, who were collecting vraic (seaweed) on the beach, and who immediately responded, – a reaction gratefully acknowledged by all the escapees, who were all in pretty poor shape, following the many hours of exposure and low overnight temperatures.

Francis and Eric ran back and reported their news; Francis and Mike then returned and accompanied the two Frenchmen to their farm; in the meanwhile Ken, George and Eric, on the turning tide, pushed the boat up a meandering channel between a sandbank and closer to the shoreline. Later that afternoon, the farmer friends returned with the vrac cart, helped to moor the boat securely, removed their baggage and movable gear on to the cart, and made their way over a twisting track to Monsieur Constantine's farm at La Bretonnière, about 3 km away, where his wife and daughter-in-law, Madame Fremin and her two children, Pierre and Jacqueline, greeted them with great enthusiasm; during the time the other three had stayed with the boat, Mike and Francis had explained to the family the details of their journey, and the need to obtain food and lodging for the night, and this request was immediately fulfilled.

Their wet clothes were shed, and they put on their other gear which, fortunately, had not suffered too much from sea-water. Then, at about 10 p.m. the whole company – ten in all – sat down to supper to enjoy typical Normandy fare.

The hospitality was terrific (the gastronomic details were recorded for posterity in George's meticulously kept diary!). The meal began with thick soup and crisp French bread(George had two helpings), followed by a gigantic omelette made with twenty two (22 !) eggs, which, according to reports was delicious; this was followed by fried liver and onions (George notes that he had two helpings – again -); all this was accompanied by red wine and many glasses of cider; white bread and butter ad. lib and a spread not unlike the Jersey Black Butter – reported to be 'very good' – and finally, black coffee and Calvados!! Many toasts of 'Encore' and 'Vive La France' were drunk, and, at the conclusion of the feast, the five retired to bed.

On the Sunday morning – 12 November – after a good night's sleep and breakfast, the five were taken by horse-drawn carriage into the small town of Bréhal where they reported to the local Gendarmerie. They were told that they would have to contact the American authorities in Granville on the following day, as the relevant military office was closed on a Sunday!

Somewhat disappointed, they returned to the farm and later that afternoon, removed the engine from the boat and brought it to the farm.

On the Monday morning, the boat was collected from the beach using a two horse-drawn cart and stored safely in a shed at the back of the farm. In the afternoon, they walked to Bréhal to enquire about transport, but the local Gendarmerie were unable to assist; following this disappointment, they left the police station and, wandering through the town, they came across an American Sergeant – the first person they had met since their arrival who could converse with them in English – who introduced them to some American Officers who ran a Transport Section; the latter were extremely interested to hear of their escape, gave them an enormous meal, followed by several generous tots of Scotch whisky. The outcome was that transport would be laid on for the party the following day for the journey to Granville so they returned to the farm feeling very pleased with themselves, although George admits that the combination of food and drink caused him to have a very restless night; happily, all was well the following morning, when they took leave of the family who had made them so welcome; Mons. Fremin took them to Bréhal, where an American truck took them to Granville.

Here, at the American Headquarters at the Grand Hotel, they underwent several interrogations; they also made contact with the British Ministry of War

Transport located near the Hotel to find out whether and when they could be taken to Cherbourg for onward passage to England; they were all given 100 Francs as a subsistence allowance, and were provided with rooms at the Hotel Moderne.

On Wednesday 15 November, they reported to the Counter-Intelligence Corps with a map of Jersey marked out with what they could remember of the German fortifications etc; by now the C.I.C. were satisfied that the five were not Germans speaking fluent English, and gave them clearance to leave Granville; they were then informed that transport would be available the following day to take them to Cherbourg, and were given a further 100 Francs subsistence.

At 9.45 am on the Thursday Mike, George, Ken and Eric left Granville in a Hillman van en route for Cherbourg. Francis Le Sueur remained behind, hoping to obtain a position as an interpreter with the American forces. The quartet passed through numerous towns and villages and saw much devastation, arriving in Cherbourg at 4.30 pm. They were taken to the R.A.F Headquarters to meet the Commanding Officer, and then to the Mess where, to their great surprise, they came across Peter Crill, John Floyd, and Roy Mourant having tea! (This trio had left Jersey on 11 November – see next Chapter). Both groups exchanged news and their respective stories.

Now came a period of waiting for transport to England. The weather had taken a turn for the worst, with high winds and rain squalls, and it was not until Wednesday 22 November that the crossing was possible. In the interim, the port of Cherbourg was explored – an area of great devastation, remains of blasted buildings, shattered German bunkers, and many half sunk ships in the harbour area, including one which was later discovered as being the S.S. *Normand* which had flown the Jersey flag and had been put at the disposal of the States' of Jersey by the Germans to transport goods for the islanders from France.

During this time, also, they were joined by Norman Rumball, Max Le Sueur, Edward ('Snipe') Le Masurier, (who had also left Jersey the same night as Peter Crill & Co), and Francis Le Sueur, who had failed to remain with the Americans. This latest 'intake' of escapees from Jersey brought the total awaiting shipment to England to eleven; a challenge made to a Royal Engineers detachment to a football match was declined by the military!

At 6.30 am on the Wednesday, under escort of Wing Commander Brown, they all boarded the Hampton Ferry which sailed at 8.50 am. Although the gales had abated it was a rolling-pitching passage, and all were happy when the nine hour journey to Southampton was over. After completing 'Immigration procedures' they were taken to Northlands hostel where they stayed the night.

The following day Ken, Mike Eric and George went to London by train with Wing Commander Brown and taken to a Rest Centre at Rochester Row, Westminster, and on Friday 24 November, at their final interrogation and debriefing at the War Office, they were able to provide the Intelligence Captain with a considerable amount of detailed information about the defences, armaments and morale of the Germans, and the state of the local civilian population; someone had even brought over a loaf of bread – very stale by now! They all agreed to assist and to accompany any Allied landing in the Channel Islands which was being considered at the time; subsequently, this scheme was discarded as being too costly in probable loss of life, both military and civilian.

After lunch that day, they went to the Channel Islands Refugee Centre at 21 Upper Grosvenor Place, where they were kitted out with a suit, 2 prs of socks, two shirts, a pair of shoes, 2 handkerchiefs and 2 prs of pyjamas. Here, John and George met Lord Justice du Parcq who was most concerned and interested to hear about the conditions prevailing on the Island and many letters brought over for relatives in England were handed over. On their return to the Rest Centre, they met up with Charles Bondis who had escaped from Jersey two months previously (See Chapter 6), and who was now working for a wine merchant in London. That week end, the five split up and went their various ways...

Ken Parris joined the Royal Marines, and was stationed in Norway for some time, before his demobilisation in 1947. In civilian life, he worked for a firm in Bristol, where he married his Norwegian fiancee, moving to Norway in 1952, where he still lives.

Michael Price volunteered for aircrew training on 1 December 1944, and, after demobilisation, resumed his medical training at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, qualifying in May 1952. His lifetime in medicine included the post of Resident Surgical Officer at the Jersey General Hospital from 1953/4, Ship's Surgeon on the Orient Line 1954/55, and six months sabbatical leave with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary in the South Atlantic following in the aftermath of the Falkland's War. He retired from general practice in January 1986, and he and his wife recently moved to Devon. Of their four children, James, his eldest son, qualified as a Doctor from St. Thomas's Hospital and has just completed five years in the Royal Navy.

George Le Couteur joined the Royal Navy as a 'Hostilities Only' Stores Rating on 28 November 1944, and was demobilised on 11 November 1946. Following his basic and trade training he was drafted to Chatham Barracks, Kent, where, in the Trophy Room he saw the silverware and trophies which had been presented to H.M.S. *Jersey* by the States' and people of Jersey. (Sadly, this destroyer which bore the Island's name had been sunk during the War). George spent most of his sea-time from December 1945 in and around the Mediterranean in the Victualling Office of H.M.S. *Ocean*, a newly completed light fleet aircraft carrier. On his return to Jersey in January 1947, he joined G.Orange & Co, Wine Merchants, becoming a Director in 1950; he left this firm in 1973, but continued in the same line of business until his retirement in December 1988, thus completing 42 years in the local Wine trade. He is married to Fay (née Vibert), and they have three children – Tracy, Susan and Ian.

Francis Le Sueur, after certain bureaucratic difficulties with the British authorities, managed to join the U.S. Red Cross Service in France as a truck driver. During a month's leave in July 1945, he contacted Mons. Fremin, and arranged to have Ken Parris's boat towed back to Jersey by a fishing boat. Francis travelled in the escape boat which had been ashore for the best part of a year; in consequence, during the journey back, the seams of the boat opened, and, when approaching St. Aubin's Bay, such was its waterlogged state that it had to be assisted back into the harbour by the States' Pilots, Peter Guiton and Silver Le Riche. Francis has lived for many years at Fouras, in France, and occasionally visits Jersey to renew old friendships.

Eric Prain left almost immediately for South Africa where, in farming, he has remained to this day. Unfortunately, no other details are at hand.

Postscript

Michael Price recently recalled a few points of interest. Before his departure from Jersey, of which only his mother was aware, he left two letters for his father who, Michael says, would never have consented to such a venture. One letter was to be shown to the German authorities (in the event of possible interrogation), which would exonerate his parents from any knowledge or collusion with the escape, and the second explained to his father the background and motivation for the attempt, and arranged to have a coded message broadcast on the B.B.C. radio programme 'Itma', which was very popular with the 'illicit' listeners during the Occupation. This clandestine message was carried out perfectly by the B.B.C. producer, and his parents then knew that the escape had been successful.

In 1968 Michael, accompanied by his wife, mother and four children, on a caravan holiday in Normandy, visited the site of his landing some 24 years earlier. They called in on the Fremin family, who were no longer in farming, but running a local transport business. The Constantines were long since dead, but both Pierre and Jacqueline were now parents themselves. They had a splendid re-union party with a sumptuous meal and – needless to say – much Calvados!

So ended a successful escape with, to date, all members still around to recall and retell those events of long ago....

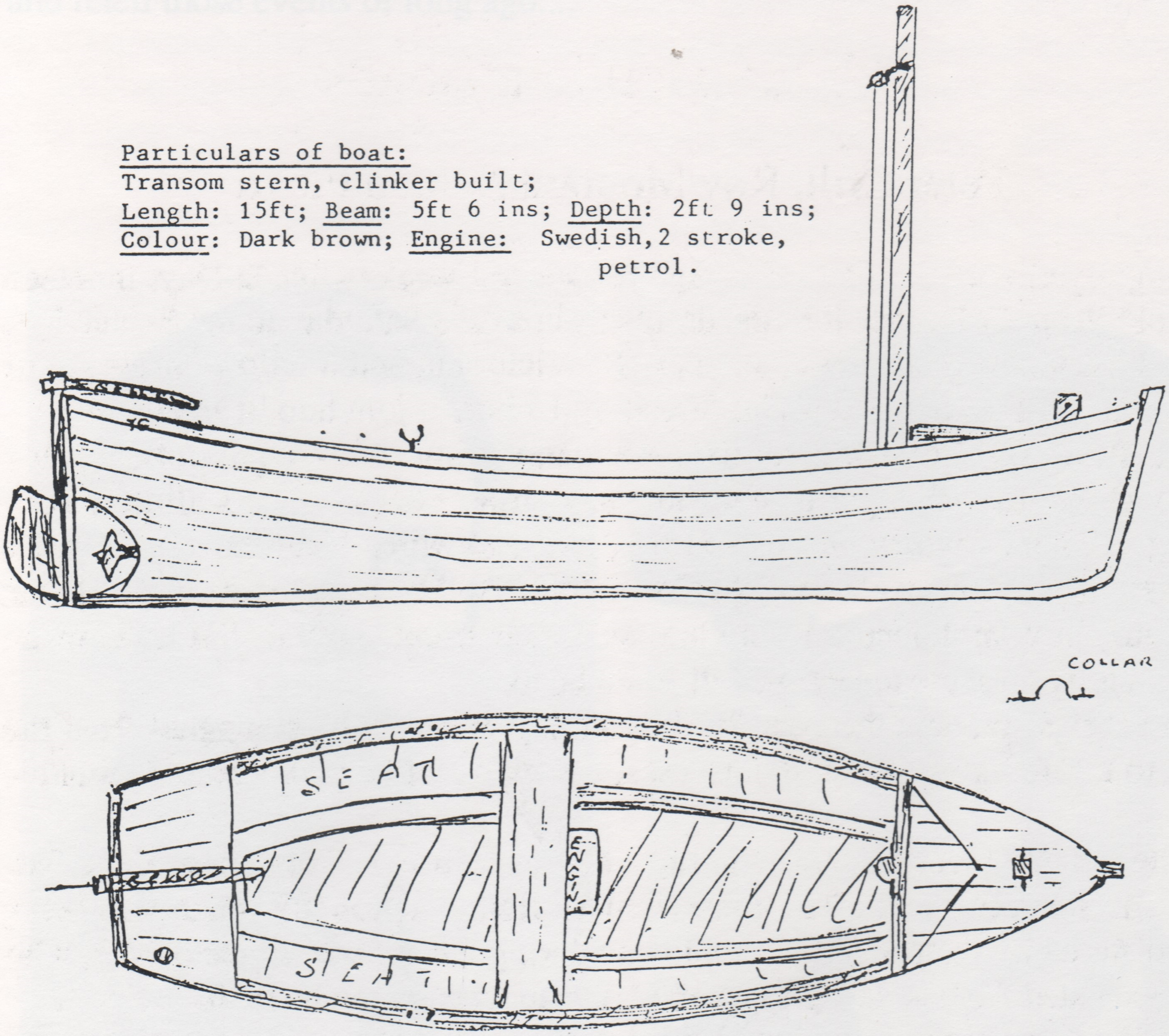
Kenneth Parris (aged 20)

Michael Price (aged 18)

George Le Couteur (aged 21)

Francis Le Sueur (aged 32)

Particulars of boat:
Transom stern, clinker built;
Length: 15ft; Beam: 5ft 6 ins; Depth: 2ft 9 ins;
Colour: Dark brown; Engine: Swedish, 2 stroke, petrol.



George Le Couteur was employed as a clerk by the Jersey Gas Light Co from January 1941 until the day of the escape on 10 November 1944.

It had been decided in the planning stages that in the event of an engine failure, provision should be made for the use of a lug sail. Accordingly, George had an iron collar made in his firm's blacksmith shop to secure the free standing mast against the foreward bulkhead.

The escape boat (sketch supplied by George Le Couteur)

CHAPTER 12

"Three Men in a Boat"

Peter Crill, Roy Mourant & John Floyd

Having toyed with the idea of escape for several weeks after D-Day, nineteen year old Peter Crill made the first definite steps on a Saturday in the September, when he asked Roy Mourant, another Old Victorian, and a fellow employee of Solicitors, Crill & Benest, of Hill Street, St. Helier, to join him in an attempt.

At first, they considered using a canoe, but with equinoctial gales approaching, they thought it wiser to use a larger boat – a 12ft sailing dinghy named *Alloette* – which was owned by Peter, and which had been stored since August 1942 at Norman's Ltd., 23 Commercial Buildings, adjacent to St. Helier Harbour, in compliance with a German Order introduced at that time in an attempt to control the location of all small boats.

In order to prepare the boat for the journey, it had to be smuggled from the store to a safe haven where the necessary work could be undertaken in relative safety.

The selected venue was a garage at Cape House, Pontorson Lane, St. Clement, some two and a half miles from St. Helier, a property which was being administered by their Solicitor employers during the absence of the owner, who had evacuated from Jersey prior to the German Occupation in 1940.

At the beginning of October a third person was recruited to join the party, John Floyd, a school contemporary of the other two.

Moving the boat from Norman's Store to Cape House had to be undertaken in daylight, a move, in itself, of considerable risk; the problem of transport was overcome thanks to Peter's friendship with the driver of a charcoal-driven pantechnicon belonging to Noel & Porter, a then well known establishment in St. Helier.

During the lunch-hour on Saturday 14 October, the van picked up the three young men and drove them to the docks. The entrance to Norman's Store was very narrow, and it was impossible to back the van inside completely. However, waiting until no-one was in sight, the driver backed up against the wall covering the door way on one side. The boat was loaded in to the van, the trio jumped aboard, and they drove off through the town.

In order to avoid the main road to St. Clement, the route chosen was a narrow country road called La Blinerie Lane, where the van's occupants experienced a few moments of excitement and apprehension, when a landau, driven by a German officer suddenly appeared in the lane.

The appearance of the 'furniture van' coming along the lane in the opposite direction proved a welcome opportunity for the German to demonstrate his horse-driving skills. He cheerfully backed the landau into a conveniently placed field entrance off the lane, and waved on the van and its three 'removal men'; the remainder of the journey to Pontorson Lane was completed satisfactorily, and the boat unloaded into the garage at Cape House without further incident.

The preparations.

Many repairs were necessary before the boat could be considered as seaworthy, and these took the best part of the next three weeks.

A professional boat-builder, Mr.A. Langdon, was engaged for this task, which included strengthening the keel, decking over the bows, a new piece being fixed on the transom to hold the outboard motor, and the fitting of a 5" piece of cedar used for washboards as far as the first thwart – an addition to the freeboard which was found to be very useful.

An engine was purchased from a fisherman in Gorey Village for £36, and was duly collected by Roy Mourant and his friend Robert Bryant – another ex-school colleague of the trio, who had borrowed an Excelsior 2 stroke motorcycle. The route from Roy's home at Bagot Manor Farm to Gorey and back was made through side lanes to avoid German attention, the use of petrol driven civilian transport being strictly forbidden. The engine, a 2 cylinder BRIT Fisherman Twin, was supported on its journey by the pillion-riding Roy back to Bagot Manor Farm where, on 17 October, it was tested in water for three-quarters of an hour on a quart of petrol; the motor was then stopped and tested to see whether it would re-start when hot; the test proved satisfactory. Incidentally, the petrol for the test had been obtained by the clandestine entering of an Organisation Todt fuel depot and the syphoning of the fuel from German drums stored inside the camp.

Meanwhile, many conferences were held, and the sea crossing planned, based on data supplied by some fishermen, one in particular, Mike Le Clercq, giving them valuable information about the tides. Food supplies for the journey were decided upon, and the all-important embarkation point discussed. In deciding the latter, three points in particular had to be considered – the number of German guards and patrols, the off-shore rocks, and the coastal currents in relation to the tide times.

It was finally agreed to leave at high tide, and 'Bellair' at Fauvic, on the East coast of the Island, was selected as the ideal point of embarkation, as the sea was accessible at all states of the tide, and there were very few rocks off-shore. John Floyd had carried out a detailed reconnaissance of the deployment and movement of German patrols, and had found that they only patrolled in the crucial beach area on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays – so a Saturday was selected as one of the anticipated 'safe' days for departure; during these investigations it was also discovered that a minefield which covered the beach from Gorey southwards towards Fauvic stopped just short of the beach opposite 'Bellair'.

At this stage, it had been further decided to leave at the same time as another attempt, which was being made by Edward 'Snipe' Le Masurier, and his two companions, Max Le Sueur and Norman Rumball. (It is recalled that Edward had been instrumental in helping in Francis Le Sueur's escape from prison a short while before – See Chapter 4).

At 10 a.m. on Saturday 11 November 1944, both parties agreed that they would leave that night. A favourable weather forecast had been obtained by one of Edward Le Masurier's friends from a friendly German at the Harbour Office, and it was considered that the sea had abated sufficiently to enable small boats to operate with reasonable safety.

Our three young men spent the rest of the day making final preparations and saying their 'goodbyes'. A certain amount of difficulty was experienced in obtaining the pantechnicon to deliver the boat from Pontorson Lane to Fauvic, but, at 7 p.m. the boat was loaded up and reached the embarkation area at 7.15 p.m. The engine, together with Roy Mourant and John Floyd and his sister Elise, were taken without incident from Roy's house to Fauvic by Mr. A.C. Halliwell who, by virtue of his appointment as Surgeon at the Jersey General Hospital, was one of the few civilians in Jersey permitted to own and use his own car. Edward Le Masurier's boat had been taken to Fauvic that afternoon and hidden.

It was a very dark night and the sea wall, according to those involved, was 'rather like Piccadilly Circus', there being some 30 or so people to see them off, including two Victoria College prefects, Charles Gruchy and Martin Le Cornu, who were themselves to be involved very directly with the Germans a couple of days later; (their stories are recounted later in this book). Remarkably, none of this activity was noticed by the Germans, even when the wood-burning van stalled its engine and, in restarting it, created a monumental noise!

Both boats reached the water's edge without mishap, and at 8.05 p.m. they both pushed off.

The Journey.

In order to get well clear of the coast-line, both boats were rowed out on an east-south-east course for about 1¼ hours before starting their engines; one navigation difficulty was that of looking at the compass without showing too much light, and, as the Peter & Co. boat was leading, John, who was in the bows, had to shade the compass with his coat using a torch and calling out the course as they went along; unfortunately, the gyrating compass brought on an attack of 'mal de mer', but he managed to carry on between bouts.

Both boats forged ahead until Edward's stopped, due to a choked jet; Peter's boat stopped in order to give a tow, but during this operation, some sea-water must have got on to their leads when the swell between the boats lopped over the side, and they could not restart their engine; after several attempts both boats had to separate and hoist their sails. Edward's boat having a bigger sail spread soon left the other behind.

Peter's boat continued on their course for about an hour when another problem occurred; Peter was steering at the time and the main sheet slipped out of his hand (the sail was only a small lug without a boom). He called out to John to grab it, which he did, but as he leaned over the gunwale, the boat tipped and the compass fell into the water which was by now swilling around in the bottom of the boat. Although the compass was encased in a box, it must have fallen face downward and water had got inside, and in an attempt to tap the water out, the compass card was smashed, rendering the compass useless.

They therefore had to steer by wind direction, which, luckily, was blowing from the north-west and so it was fairly easy to keep a south-easterly course.

In about an hour it came on to blow so much that the seas became too rough for further sailing, so they decided to anchor; the mast and sail were stowed away and they made to unship the anchor and rope; unfortunately the sisal rope, a new coil, had not been stretched before starting the trip, and it proved an impossible task to unravel the many fathoms of tangled rope by the light of only a small hand torch; indeed, the heaving of the rope as the boat rose and fell to each wave caused each one of them to 'seek the side' once more.

Eventually with no compass, the sea too rough to sail, and the anchor rope in such a mess, they adopted the only possible course of action; a boat left to herself will always ride the sea better than 'under way', so they let it drift while they covered themselves over with canvas sheets and tried to get some sleep, John and Roy in the bows under the half-decking, and Peter across the rear thwarts. This situation must have been the period when their morale touched rock bottom – they were all wet through and miserably sea-sick and probably almost lost all interest in their fate; they passed the night in a semi-frozen coma, but dimly realised that time was slipping away and that they were being taken slowly in the direction of the French coast, for they were now in the main tidal stream setting north-east from south-west, and if they had still been in the Jersey coastal currents they would have been taken round the north of the Island, if not all the way around, and finally probably ashore. Occasionally one of them roused himself and baled out the surplus water.

Landfall.

By daylight, the sea had abated, and Roy cleaned the plugs and got the engine started again. The sun rose and they steered slightly north of it; they saw several birds which cheered them up, and eventually they sighted a tower on the horizon to the east, and this acted as a mark until the coast spread dimly behind it. They were a little concerned that the land might not be France and were expecting any moment to see a patrol boat approaching.

About two miles from the shore the motor stopped, and this time it was impossible to start again, so they had to begin to row; as they had eaten quite a hearty breakfast – John recalls eating pork sandwiches – they did not mind, at first, the physical effort required. It was only when they saw the houses receding instead of getting larger that they began to realise what had happened; the current had taken them practically to the shore during the night, the nearest point to it must have been reached at about 5 a.m., when the tidal direction began to swing them away again; the tide was falling and it would be about another four hours before it began to make again in the right direction of the flood. However, Roy had one more go at the motor and it started and kept going this time.

They drew near the deserted beach and, after coasting up and down for a short time to find a suitable place, they landed at 1.05 p.m. on the Sunday afternoon after a journey of some seventeen hours at a point south of Geffosses, and close to the small coastal town of Coutainville

Leaving John in charge of the boat, Peter and Roy went up the beach to the nearest house to see whether there was a harbour nearby to moor the boat; they returned to the beach with a number of locals, who helped them to beach the boat and remove all their gear to a nearby house. The three were then taken to a French inn where, after a hot wash and changing into borrowed clothing supplied by the inn-keeper, they were served a hot meal; they sat by a blazing fire until eight o'clock with all the villagers asking questions, before retiring to bed and sleeping for twelve hours! That night the weather broke and it blew hard.

The following day they contacted an American patrol in a jeep, which took them to Barnville, where they underwent a preliminary interrogation by a colonel. An armed escort then took them to Cherbourg where, after having their identities established, they were housed in the billets of the Intelligence H.Q. G2 U.S. Army. Following another interrogation the next day, they were handed over to the R.A.F. Commander in charge of the embarkation unit at Cherbourg for transport to England.

It was arranged that one of the party should return to collect their kit; Peter won the toss of the coin, and on the following day, Wednesday 15 November, he was taken back to Coutainville, where their clothes had been washed and dried by the innkeeper and the housewife of a nearby cottage; he also had the good luck to sell the boat and all the equipment for 12,000 francs (about £60), returning that evening to Cherbourg; (it is interesting to record that Peter removed the nameplate of the *Alloette*, which he has retained to this day).

At lunchtime the following day, they met four of the party of five who had left Jersey the night before them (Ken Parris & Co), and later that day Edward Le Masurier's party arrived, making eleven Jersey escapees at the depot!

There was then a delay in getting to England, and it wasn't until the following Wednesday – 22 November – that they boarded the Hampton ferry en route for Southampton at 9 p.m., arriving at 6 p.m. the following day, after what was described as a 'fresh' passage.

They were taken to a hostel where they were to sleep for the night; following a meal, they were interrogated by the security people who took from them several papers and letters, and by the Immigration Officer who gave them landing visas and passes. The next day they travelled to London and slept at the Rochester Row Rest Centre. At 10 o'clock on the Friday they were interviewed at the War Office, after which they took advantage of the generosity of the Channel Islands Refugee Committee at 20 Upper Grosvenor Street and were fitted out with clothes and footwear. They then went their separate ways.

Peter Crill was dissuaded by his surviving brother from joining the Armed Forces, as another brother had recently been killed.

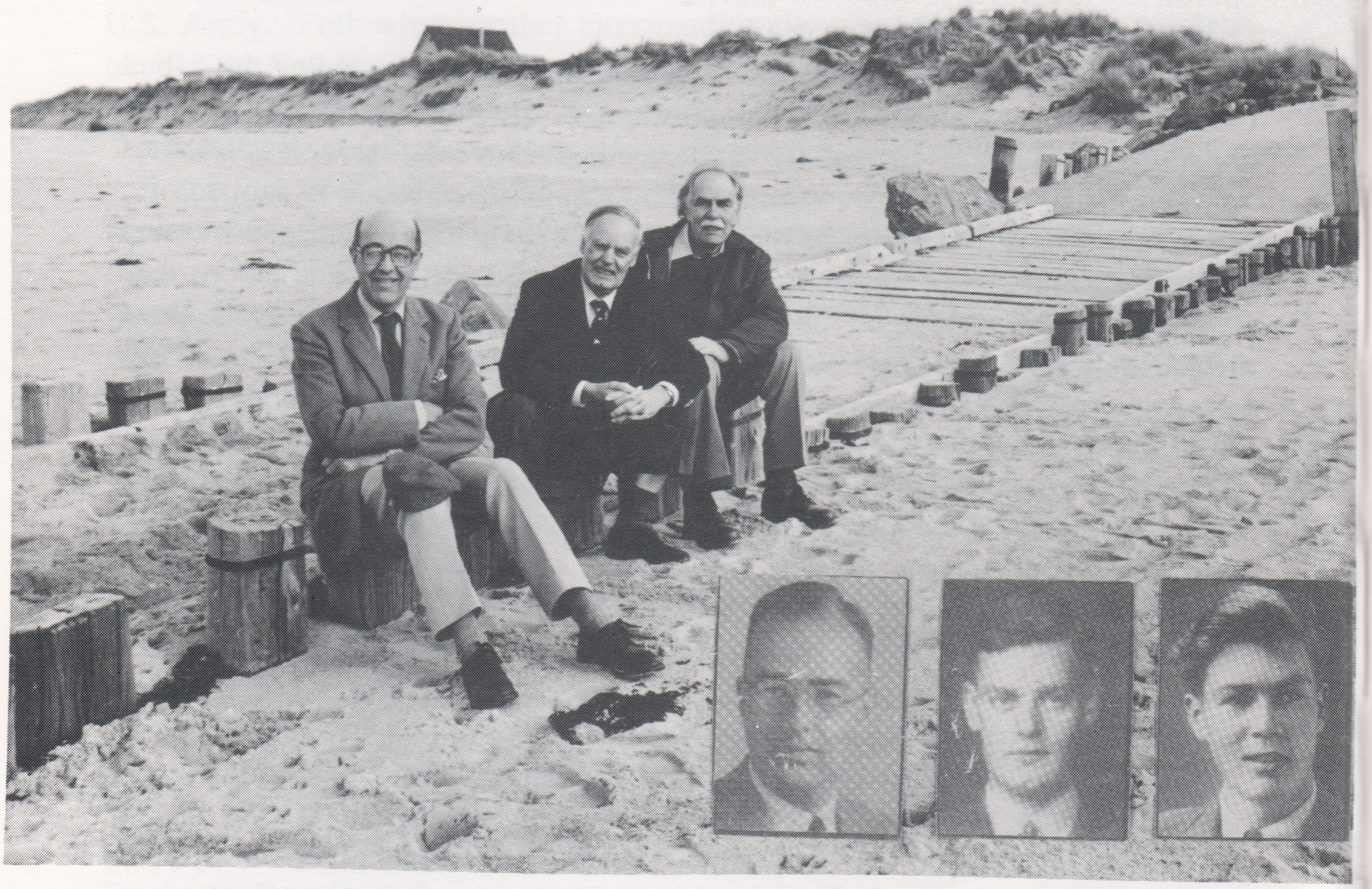
Instead he went to Exeter College Oxford on a King Charles' Scholarship reading Law. He was called to the Bar, Middle Temple and the Jersey Bar in 1949, and was in private practice until 1962; he was elected to serve in the States of Jersey, first as Deputy for St. Clement in 1951, then as a Senator in

1960. In 1962 he was appointed H.M. Solicitor-General, in 1969 Attorney-General, Deputy Bailiff in 1974, and Bailiff of Jersey in 1986; he was Knighted on 13th June 1987.

Roy Mourant enlisted in the Royal Navy in January 1945, and was demobilised at the end of 1947. He then spent two years as a law student, but decided to give this up and return to farming in Jersey, with which he was to become much involved, including founder member of the Jersey Farmers Co-operative, the Jersey Milk Marketing Board, and the Jersey Agricultural Federation for some seventeen years.

John Floyd joined the Army, and served in the Far East, including the Allied Occupation Force in Japan in 1945, and Malaya. He was demobilised in 1948, and entered Queen's University Belfast for four years; as a Bachelor of Agriculture, he served as an agronomist on a sugar-cane estate in Jamaica for nineteen years, returning to Jersey in 1970, where he took a teachers training course and taught at the States Agricultural Farm in Jersey.

Some forty years later, at the invitation of the Jersey Evening Post, the three men made a nostalgic trip back to France and revisited the beach near where they came ashore, and toasted the memory of their shared adventure.



Peter Crill, Roy Mourant and John Floyd pictured on the beach near Geffosses (inset) as they looked approximately forty years ago (photo by Glenn Rankine J.E.P.)

CHAPTER 13

“A Fatal Quartet”

Ronald and Madeleine Bisson, André Gorvel and Roy Luciennes

On 14 November 1944, under the heading “Four men drowned in attempting to leave the Island”, the Germans published the following in the ‘Evening Post’....

“In spite of strict prohibition, four Islanders again tried to leave the Island yesterday in order to avoid the common fate of the inhabitants. Their boat was driven ashore and dashed to pieces against the cliffs of the north coast, they themselves were drowned. The population will only have to put to the credit of such irresponsible persons if the occupying authorities are now forced to take stricter measures for the enforcement of their orders.”

Leslie Sinel’s Occupation Diary for the same day recorded....

“There is no doubt that the party left from Rozel two nights ago – three men and a woman – and local eye-witnesses declare the boat was seen dashing against the rocks off Saline Bay, but no help could be given because of mines.”

On the next day two bodies, those of André Gorvel and Ronald Bisson were washed up on the North coast of the Island and towards the end of the month, the bodies of Roy Luciennes and Madeleine Bisson were recovered, the latter’s being found on the beach near Braye slip, St. Brelade. All inquests returned the same verdicts – accidental drowning.

It was stated at one of the inquests held on 17 November that the boat, which had been taken from Gorey harbour, had been seen drifting for two hours until it had capsized after hitting some rocks at La Saline Bay, St.John; no attempt had been made by the Germans to rescue the occupants, and local eye-witnesses declared that no help could have been given by them on account of the minefields in the area.

Obviously, no one will ever know precisely what happened on that fateful day, but, 46 years later – to the day – on Sunday 11 November 1990, a weekly programme broadcast over the local B.B.C. Radio Jersey network entitled 'Eune Lettre Jerriaise', and spoken in Jersey-French by one of Jersey's best known and much respected Jerseywomen, Mrs Eileen Le Sueur, gave poignant details of an event which occurred involving one of the fated party, André Gorvel ...

André Louis Gorvel was in his twentieth year, and lived with his parents at Five Oaks, St. Saviour; he was on the staff of Jim Samson's hairdressing shop in New Cut, St. Helier, and was a popular member of St. Thomas's Men's Club.

He used to make regular visits to Clair Val Farm, St. Saviour, the property of John Le Sueur, husband of Eileen, who used to supply the Gorvel family, amongst many others, with various items of farm produce to help supplement the very meagre rations available to the civilian population.

On Sunday 12 November, during André's usual routine visit to Clair Val, he remarked to Mrs. Le Sueur that he had noticed a tin of petrol in their shed, which, incidentally, had been issued by the Jersey Agricultural Society for use on the farm; André asked whether he could have the petrol, explaining that he was attempting to make an escape from the Island that night.

Eileen Le Sueur tried to dissuade him, referring to the risks involved, and the prevailing bad weather, but André, persistently mentioning the names of the other three participants and saying they had a boat and were all ready to go, but didn't quite have sufficient petrol for the engine; he became very emotional – in fact, he was by now crying – and his earnest pleading eventually persuaded Eileen to agree to his request. She put the petrol – a 2 gallon container – in a sack, gave it to André, and the last she saw of him was making his way across the fields towards his home at Five Oaks.

The following morning – Monday – Mrs. Le Sueur received a letter from André, posted at Five Oaks the previous evening, in which this young man's last written thoughts are recorded for posterity:

> Highbury,
> Five Oaks,
> St.Saviours.
>
> Nov 12 1944.
>
> Dear Mr. and Mrs. Le Sueur,
> Just a line before I try and get away, to thank you for all the good you have done for me and my family. I appreciate it from the bottom of my heart. I wish you luck in the future and I hope everything will turn out alright for you, I am sorry in a way to leave but we are all fed up with the life we have to put up

with, if we are lucky enough to get across I shall be more than delighted, if not we shall land in Gloucester Street Mansion* but our spirit will not be broken, but I pray and with God's blessing I hope we shall be alright.
So I will end my short letter, and say, not Good bye but Aurevoir.

From one of your devoted friends,

André.

Thank you once again.
P.S. (Give my love to Guy)**

Tragically, it will be appreciated that, by the time Eileen Le Sueur read the letter, young André and his companions had already drowned.

At each of the subsequent funerals of these young people, strict instructions were issued by the Germans that no processions were allowed to follow the hearse, in order to prevent the possibility of some form of demonstration.

André Gorvel's funeral took place at St. Martin's R.C. Church at 8.15 a.m. on 20 November; there were twenty principal mourners, including the Le Sueurs; the Church was packed with sympathizers, many of whom had walked miles to pay their last respects, and over 75 wreaths were taken to the Church by John Le Sueur on his horse-drawn cart.

At different times during the month, funeral services were held at St. Thomas's R.C. Church in St. Helier for the other three victims; Ronald Bisson and his wife Madeline were buried at St. Saviour, and the young Frenchman, Roy Luciennes, was laid to rest at St.. Martin.

Thus ended a tragic attempt at escape,and the events yet again underlined the tremendous risks taken by all those who made their efforts to obtain Freedom ...

A fitting epitaph for those who failed, and a glowing tribute to those who did succeed can be summed up in a phrase written by André Gorvel all those years ago ...

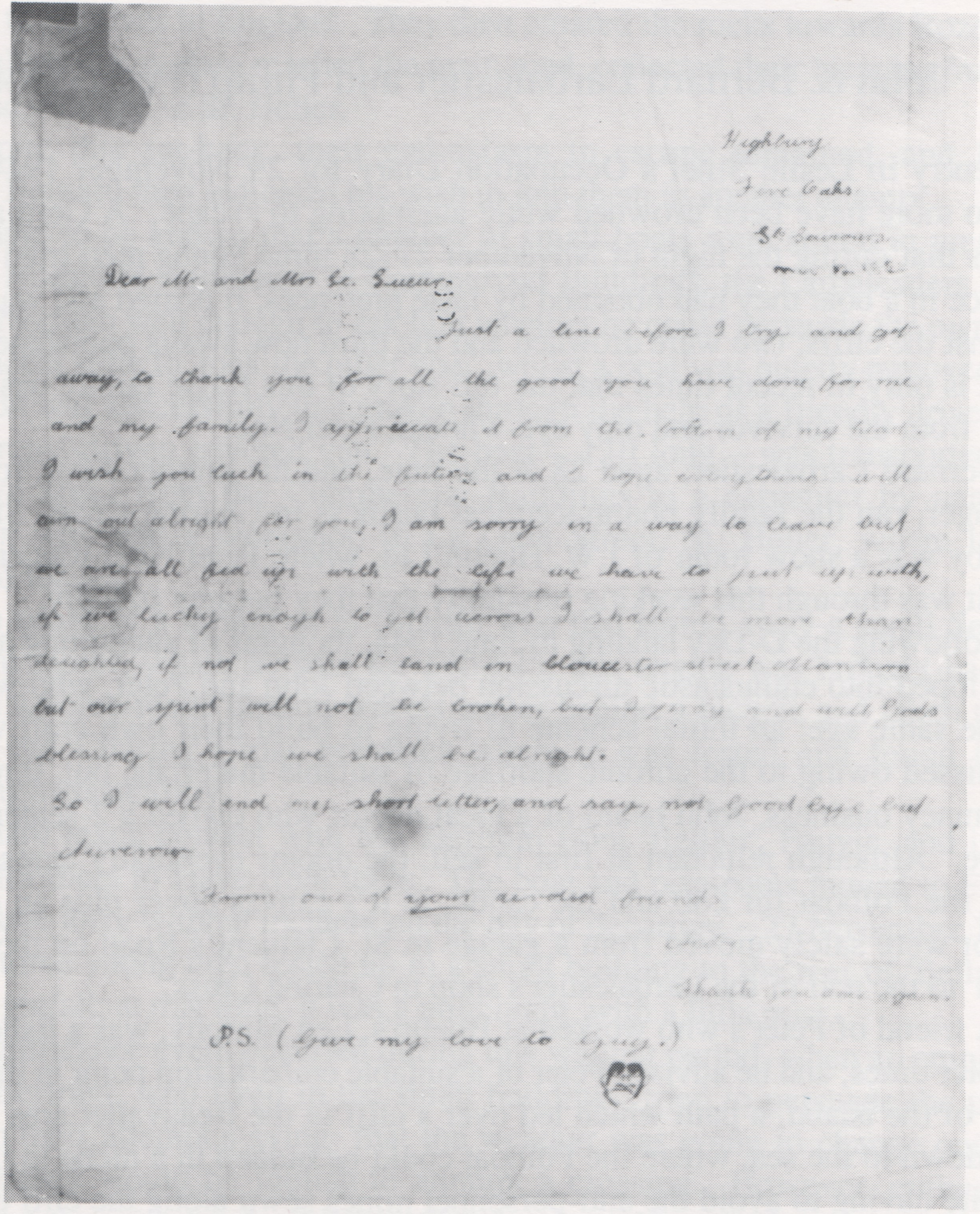
"... our spirit will not be broken ..."

---

* A reference to the prison in St.Helier.

** Eileen's young son.

André Gorvel



Highbury
Five Oaks
St Saviours
[illegible]

Dear Mr and Mrs Le Sueur

Just a line before I try and get away, to thank you for all the good you have done for me and my family. I appriciate it from the bottom of my heart. I wish you luck in the future and I hope everything will turn out alright for you, I am sorry in a way to leave but we are all fed up with the life we have to put up with, if we lucky enough to get across I shall be more than delighted, if not we shall land in Gloucester street Mansion but our spirit will not be broken, but I pray and with Gods blessing I hope we shall be alright.

So I will end my short letter, and say, not Good bye but Aurevoir

From one of *your* devoted friends.

André

Thank you once again

P.S. (Give my love to Guy.)

André Gorvel's letter to Mrs Eileen Le Sueur

CHAPTER 14

"One Came Back ..."

John & Bernard Larbalestier and Philip (Peter) Noel

An entry in Leslie Sinel's Occupation Diary for 29 November 1944 reads.: "Two more have been drowned while attempting to escape. A German notice states that during the night of November 27–28 three young men tried to get to France in a boat they had obtained by false pretences; it drifted and was thrown against the cliffs; two were drowned and the third now awaits punishment.."

It is only in recent times that the full story of this tragic failure has come to light from the survivor and only eye-witness, Peter Noel.

Bernard Larbalestier, aged 28 at the time, and his brother John, four years younger, ran the family pharmaceutical business in Charing Cross, St. Helier; nearby was a show room of J.W. Huelin Ltd. where Peter Noel was employed, and it was through this working proximity that they became friendly.

Following the D-Day landing in June 1944, thoughts of attempting an escape developed into enthusiastic discussion between John and Peter, who were both of the same age; an initial scheme of trying to build their own craft was soon dismissed owing to the chronic shortage of suitable materials, but, through the pharmacy business, John heard of a local doctor who owned a 2-seater Folboat canoe. Although reluctant at first to sell, the doctor eventually agreed to part with the Folboat for £80 and the canoe, in it's canvas cover plus an outboard motor were safely moved from a garage in St. Clement's Road on the edge of town to the rear of the Larbalestier's shop in Charing Cross.

A friend of Peter's who worked at Huelin's, Len Murphy, was a fisherman in happier times, and he advised Peter of a suitable embarkation point in the North-East of the island, a path which led over a cliff in the Beauvallet area of Rozel and down to the sea, where the Folboat could be hidden in a niche in the rocks; despite having to avoid the anti-personnel mines sewn along the cliff edge, this part of the operation was carried out without incident . On the day of departure – sometime in July/August, having left their bicycles at a nearby farm, they made their way down the cliff path, again avoiding the mines and the barbed wire which was strewn about, assembled the Folboat, waited until it was dark, and then set off, paddling two or three miles out due north before they fitted the engine on and attempted to start it; this it refused to do, despite the fact that it had been tested beforehand. Neither John nor Peter felt physically capable of paddling to France, so all they could do was to return to the island; the Folboat drifted to the east, and at about 3 a.m. they landed west of La Coupe, sinking the craft and its contents, which included a batch of letters from fellow islanders written to relatives in England. They then crossed the rocks towards Rozel Bay and at about 7 a.m. they reached the main road, collected their bicycles from the farm and returned to St. Helier.

Despite this set-back, their enthusiasm to escape remained, and John's brother Bernard then indicated his wish to join them in another attempt.

It came to be known that a number of small boats were stored in premises next to Norman's warehouse in Commercial Buildings; the Larbalestiers knew Arthur Norman well enough to ask him whether he could persuade the owner of the adjacent store to 'look the other way', whilst a boat was quietly removed; this operation was successfully undertaken through the help of a friendly driver and his charcoal-driven covered van. The boat – 12ft long – was transported into the town area from the Commercial Buildings to a carpenter by name of Hedouin who had a workshop in Le Geyt Street, St. Helier, where it was prepared for sea.

John heard of a farmer in St. Martin who had stored away a small Seagull outboard motor, which he sold for £20-£25; this engine was brought back to town in a home-made box-on-wheels trailer behind a bicycle and taken to the rear of the Charing Cross premises where it was tested and found to be operating satisfactorily.

Bernard made contact with Mr. Bertram from 'Bellair', Fauvic, and it was agreed for them to leave from there. The boat and occupants moved to Fauvic in the same lorry without incident on the day of departure – 27 November 1944.

The three young men rested up in a small building to the rear of 'Bellair' to await nightfall; at that time, it was a mild night, with a little mist.

A significance event occurred during this waiting period, when an employee of Mr. Bertram, who lived in the small building, tried to persuade the trio to abandon their attempt,s aying that the weather was going to change quickly, and that they would be foolish to attempt a crossing. However, enthusiasm over-ruled the wise head, and sometime between 10 and 11 p.m., they moved the boat down to the sea, loaded up and were off.

They rowed out for about 3 to 4 miles before they started up the engine, which functioned for some 15-20 minutes before the throttle cable parted, due probably to years of non-use; they had no tools or spares to effect repairs, and , to make matters worse, the weather changed – the wind increased from the south-east and drove them back in increasingly rough seas towards St. Catherine's breakwater – the warning of a few hours before by an unknown person was coming true. They jettisoned the useless engine and awaited their fate.

As luck would have it, they were swept to the south – and inner – side of the breakwater; as the boat hit the breakwater, Peter managed to jump out and cling on to the rough side of the granite and climbed up to the top. Here he looked back down; John was in the water with an inflated car inner-tube around him, while Bernard was astride the stricken boat, which had overturned.

Peter called down to them, and said he would try and find some rope; he discovered a length of wire – about 25-30 ft long – on the breakwater, passed it over the wall down to John – Bernard looked reasonably safe for the moment – with the intention of pulling John back down the breakwater until he could climb up in safety.

Just before reaching this spot, Peter, still pulling John, came across a massive barbed-wire entanglement right across the breakwater; here, Peter had no alternative other than to climb down the wall, pass under the obstruction, and climb up the other side; this he succeeded in doing, but when he took up the strain to continue pulling, there was no resistance, and John had gone – exposure and exhaustion had taken its toll.

Although greatly shocked at this, Peter immediately set about returning to the end of the breakwater to check on Bernard; before climbing under the wire again, he saw a notice "Achtung Minen" on the land-side of the obstruction! Luckily, in his movements on the breakwater, he had only walked on the wide granite edge of the breakwater and not ventured on to the main part. He walked back to the end of the breakwater where he found the upturned boat, but no Bernard, so obviously he had succumbed to the cold and tempestuous seas.

By now it was about 3 a.m.. Peter went back down the breakwater again, under the wire, on to the main road. There was a small building located there, and across the road was another wire obstacle – and a German sentry. Quite clearly, the game was up, and Peter was taken into a building nearby which was used as a guardhouse and housed an officer and six or so men.

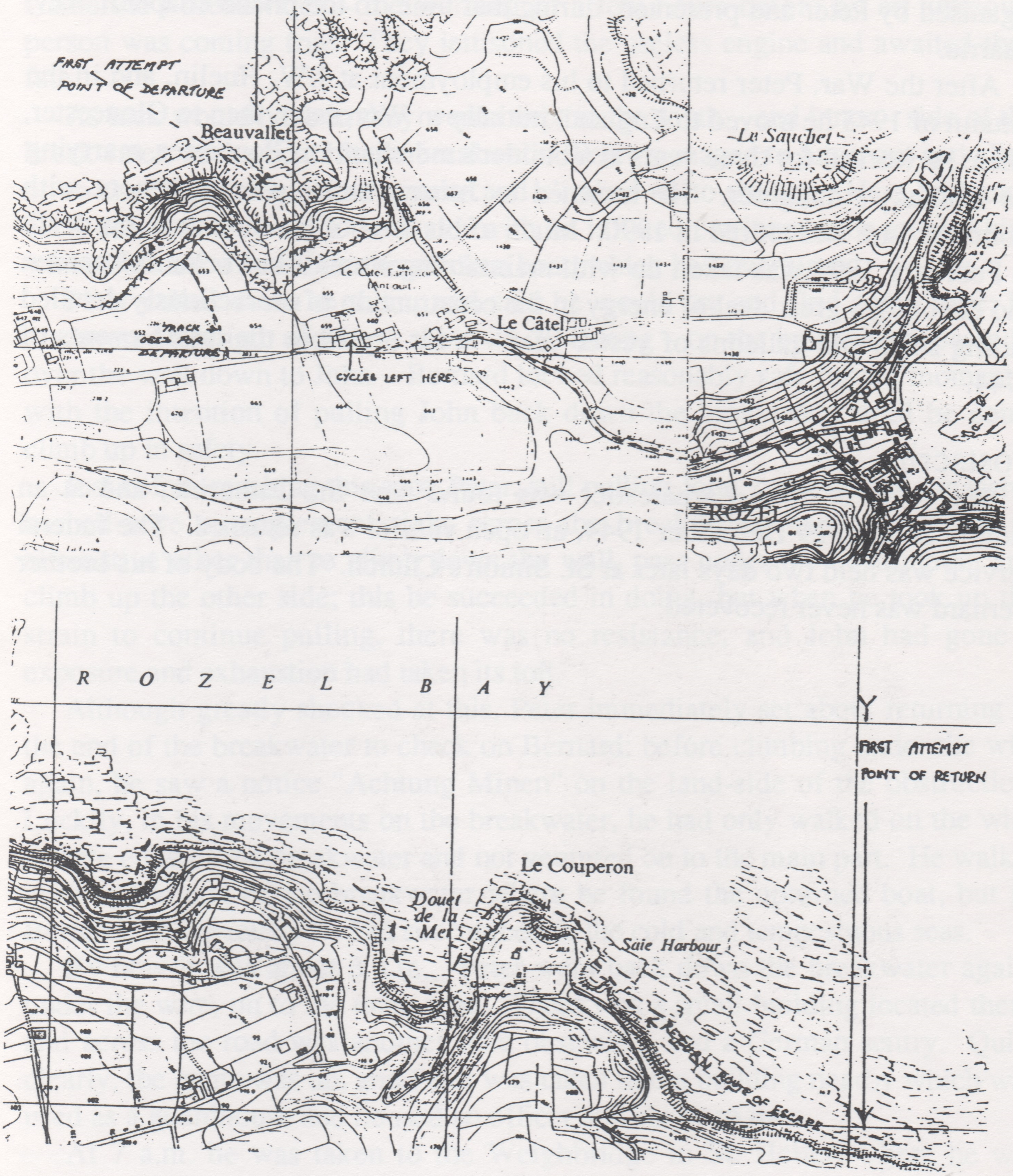
At 7 a.m. he was taken to the Weighbridge in St. Helier, where he was questioned for ten hours; later that day he was transferred to the German wing of the Gloucester Street prison; two weeks later he was sentenced by Court-Martial to ten months in prison for "attempted espionage". He remained in custody until Liberation Day on 8th May 1945.

During his sojourn in Gloucester Street he met up with many locals who were serving various terms of incarceration, and a form of 'illuminated scroll' containing the names of many of the 'political' prisoners was designed and organised by Peter and presented, during that time, to the prison chaplain, Rev. Quarrie.

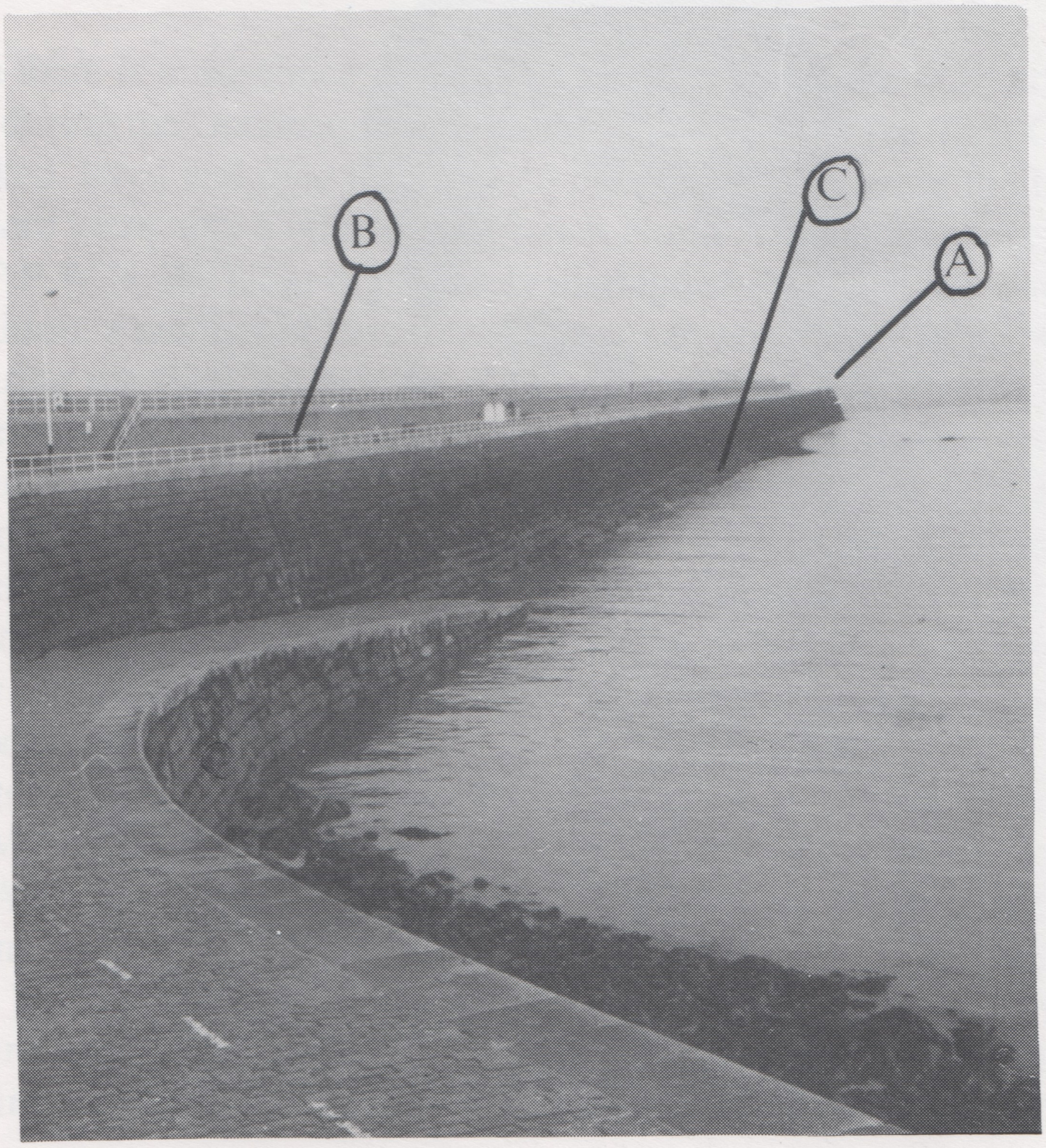
After the War, Peter returned to his employment at J.W. Huelin, and in the autumn of 1945 he moved to England, initially to Worcester, then to Gloucester, where he worked for three years at a builder's merchant in Gloucester, marrying his landlady's daughter. He returned to Jersey, took up employment with Norman's Ltd, and retired in 1990. Much of his time of his time until his death in February 1992 was taken up with maintaining a small but beautiful garden and devoting a great deal of energy in the construction of marvellously detailed sailing ships and galleons of yester-year – a far cry from the tragic events of 1944.

Postscript.

The body of John Larbalestier was found near St. Catherine, and at an inquiry held on 29 December 1944, an open verdict was returned. The funeral service was held two days later at St. Simon's Church. The body of his brother Bernard was never recovered.


FIRST ATTEMPT POINT OF DEPARTURE
Beauvallet
La Sauchet
MINES
MINES
Le Câtel
TRACK GOES FOR DEPARTURE
CYCLES LEFT HERE
ROZEL
R O Z E L B A Y
Y
FIRST ATTEMPT POINT OF RETURN
Le Couperon
Douet de la Mer
Saie Harbour
ROUTE OF ESCAPE

Map by Peter Noel showing the route through the minefield to the point of departure X, the subsequent landing place Y and the return to where Peter and John had left their bicycles



A recent photograph taken at low tide and in calm weather illustrates the approximate positions of impact (A), where Peter lost contact with John (B), and where the up-turned boat was found (C).

Peter Noel, the sole survivor

CHAPTER 15

"Links in the Chain"

Captain Edward R. Clark & Lieutenant George C. Haas Jr.

Although there is a misconception in some quarters that the only prisoners held in Jersey during the Occupation were the slave workers of the Todt Organisation who worked, lived and died in wretched circumstances during their stay on the Island, there were also a number of French North African and several hundred Russian P.P.W.'s, the latter often barely distinguishable from the slave workers.

In addition, a number of British and American service personnel were held in Jersey during the final ten months of Occupation, and this chapter recounts the chain of events which led to the successful escape of two American Officers.

Prior to August 1944, when all the Channel Islands entered a state of siege, any Allied airmen who were recovered from the sea after their aircraft had been shot down were shipped off to France for onward transmission to P.O.W. camps in Germany; after that date, any who were captured had, of necessity, to be held in Jersey, and the Germans had to establish a Prisoner-of-war camp to accommodate them.

The story of the twenty or so American service personnel began at the German Military Hospital in St. Malo, near where they had all been captured as the U.S. Army, under General Patton, turned westward for their advance along the Brittany peninsula.

As the land battle raged nearer and nearer, the Germans decided to evacuate their wounded and the Americans by sea to Jersey, the nearest territory still under their control, and this group were duly embarked on to a small converted trawler.

Amongst the wounded, who were placed on the deck of the trawler, was Lt. George Haas, an artillery Officer, whose Piper Cub spotter aircraft had been shot down on 2 August, and who had sustained a broken leg when he was fired on after crash landing near Dol, and Colonel John Reybold, wounded in the hand, who was the former C.O. of the 15th Cavalry Group, and who was destined to become the Senior Ranking Officer of the P.O.W. camp in Jersey. The unwounded men were sent below decks, and included in their number was a Texan, Capt. Ed. Clark, a 6th Armoured Division Engineer, who had been captured on 3 August near Dinan.

The trawler set sail under a full moon at the height of an Allied air raid, and after a very uncomfortable journey, arrived in St. Helier Harbour at 6 a.m. on 5 August 1944. The unwounded Americans were taken to the P.O.W. camp, which was located in the old British Garrison Military Prison on South Hill, St. Helier, while the wounded were admitted to the German section of the General Hospital where, despite the large number of German wounded who had also been evacuated from St. Malo, they were equally well treated by the Military Doctors and other staff. Following treatment at the Hospital, all the prisoners whose condition had improved were transferred to the Convalescent Hospital at the Merton Hotel, St. Helier, and, in time, they joined their comrades at the P.O.W. camp, including George Haas, who still needed the assistance of crutches.

The P.O.W. Camp.

The whole camp area was laid out in a rectangle about 150ft long and 75ft wide, overlooking St. Helier harbour, and situated beneath South Hill Gardens. One whole side of the camp was made up of stone barracks, an old guard house, the kitchen, and the enlisted men's quarters; diagonally across from the gate was another stone building which housed the N.C.O's.

Between the two stone buildings ran a 12ft rear wall of stone with 3 ft of barbed wire on top; the remaining lengthwise side consisted partly of concrete and partly of heavy chicken wire about 8ft high, securely anchored and topped with barbed wire. At the lower end of this fence, under the 20ft high stone wall forming the fourth side which separated the prisoners from the road outside, was the latrine.

Inside this upper enclosure, the Germans had erected a small wooden hut designed as the officers' quarters; this was about 25ft long and 15ft wide, with a small porch overlooking the harbour; the hut contained three rooms, two of these being bedrooms, one occupied by Col. Reybold, and the other shared by Capt. Clark and Lieut. Haas; the third room was the living room, which contained a large cupboard, a stove, several chairs and even a rug on the floor.

Escape Plans.

It was the news that a small party of Germans had escaped from an American P.O.W. camp near Granville by means of stealing a landing craft, and the continual boasting by the P.O.W. Commandant of this feat, that decided the Americans that if the Germans could organise such an escape, so could they.

With George Haas the idea became an obsession, and, following his regular visits to the Hospital for treatment where he had managed to make contact with civilians working there, he was convinced that, in the event of an escape, there would be many islanders who would give assistance on the outside.

It was decided to create a hole through the latrine wall, the spoil being hidden in a container of lime which was removed daily by one of the enlisted men on fatigue duty. Elaborate plans were worked out to obtain the right clothing, and the excavations began; unfortunately, an observant guard noticed that George Haas, engaged in his 'digging shift', seemed to be spending long periods in the latrine, and, investigating shortly after the Lieutenant had left the building, quickly discovered the reason. The result was a foregone conclusion, and George Haas was arrested on 16 December and tried before a Military Court on a charge of "Attempting to escape and destroying public property, namely one wall."

The next day, the Commandant, with full ceremony, announced the sentence – 10 days solitary confinement in the Public Prison in Gloucester Street; as the prison was full to overflowing, it was not until Christmas Eve that George Haas was removed to the prison, where he took up 'residence' with the large number of political prisoners inside; his cell measured about 6ft x 9ft, with one small window about 8ft from the floor, a bed, a table and chair, no heating, but with several blankets.

Realising that there were many others in the prison of a like mind to himself, he was resolved to make contact and he discovered that he could talk to the occupant of the cell above by standing on the chair, while the person above could converse through a hole in the floorboards of his cell; this person was Charles Gruchy, a 17½ year old, who was to provide the first solid link in the escape chain, and the reason for his presence in the prison at that time is now recounted...

Charles Gruchy.

Charles Gruchy and his friend Martin Le Cornu, both prefects at Victoria College, were among the large party of Islanders on the beach at Fauvic who had helped in the successful embarkation of the two groups on the evening of 11 November (see Chapter 12).

For some time previous to this occasion, both young men had been actively involved with making crystal sets and fitting them into various houses in the Island. One such location was at the Welcome Inn at Gorey, the property of a Mr. Nobes.

While installing the set, they had noticed a boat in a garage adjacent to the Inn; on 13 November, with thoughts of a possible escape project themselves, they cycled to Gorey after school to approach the owner, only to find that there was no one at home. They decided to await his return in a shelter on the promenade; a German patrol approached and, for no obvious reason, both the boys were arrested.

For the next few hours they were separated and taken to their respective homes; Charles recalls that he was kept out of sight in the Germans' car, his father initially being informed that he had been drowned while trying to escape. A house search followed, which revealed equipment for making crystal sets, radios, cameras, and even a gun – all items strictly verboten!

The two boys were placed in solitary confinement and subjected to days of interrogation. A Court Martial followed on 15 November, with Charles receiving a sentence of 13 months and the elder Martin 18 months; both fathers of the boys and Charles' sister were also imprisoned because of this escapade, but were subsequently released after about two months in prison.

At Christmas 1944, Charles was alone in his cell, his two previous cell-mates having been unexpectedly released on Christmas Eve, one of them being the young Dennis Ryan.

Charles had discovered that a fellow prisoner in the cell immediately below his was an American, Lieut. Haas, who had indicated that he was planning to escape from the P.O.W. camp. When Charles was satisfied of the American's bona-fides, he provided George Haas with a few 'safe' addresses, including that of the Bertrams at Fauvic, together with a rough sketch map of the Island, which he pushed through the hole in the floor boards to the cell below – the first link had been forged ...

On 2 January 1945 George Haas returned to the camp at South Hill, where the information gleaned from Charles Gruchy was passed on to Colonel Reybold, with a request by George that he be permitted to attempt an escape with another officer; this was agreed, and Capt. Ed. Clark was selected.

Various plans were discussed and discarded, until Ed. Clark's suggestion that the scaling of the 12ft high wall at the rear of the camp was considered to have the best chance of success. The sole survivor of a C47 aircraft which had crashed into the sea off Bouley Bay three months earlier, a Lieut. Blacker, pointed out that a rough ladder could be made using the two crutches that George Haas still had in his possession; these were lashed together and extra cross-pieces added to act as rungs; a bent poker was fitted to the top of the 'ladder' to serve as a grappling iron to attach to the top of the wall.

Speed was of the essence, and between 2 and 6 January, George Haas and Ed. Clark memorised the sketch map and names and addresses in case they became separated after leaving the camp.

Constant observations were kept on the guards to learn of their movements and positions, and it appeared that the best time to escape would be when the guard was due to change at the end of the night shift.

It was also noted that the Germans checked the prisoners at two hourly intervals during the night, and the escapees decided they would get the guards used to the idea of them sleeping with their heads under the blankets; so, no matter how uncomfortable it was, George and Ed. curled up into a ball with the blankets over their heads and, sure enough, when the Corporal of the guard came in, he turned back the blankets to identify each officer personally; on the next night, however, he merely flashed his torch on the 'humps' on the beds and retired satisfied.

It was decided that the back window was the best way out of the hut, as the iron bars which had been fixed across the window were just far enough apart to enable a man to crawl through; this exit procedure was practised by crawling underneath the chairs in the hut.

On Sunday 7 January 1945, they decided to make their attempt before dawn the following morning, and all that day the final preparations were made; the enlisted men supplied extra food in the shape of a quarter of a loaf of bread, four apples and four buns; both were to wear extra clothing – wool socks, mittens, underwear, sweaters and shirts as well as the precious civilian overcoats. Ed. Clark had secured a pair of leather gloves from one of the enlisted men to help in bending the barbed wire on top of the wall, thereby making matters easier for George Haas with his still partially crippled leg. In addition, they prepared a list of names, on tissue paper, of all the men in the camp, and also carried letters from Colonel Reybold and Lieutenant Blacker to their families, to be addressed and sent on if the escape was successful.

That evening, after supper, while the guard was at the front of the hut, the exit window at the back was broken, and the iron bars set farther apart, all ready for the early departure.

Both men awoke at about seven o'clock; it was still dark and would remain so for a further 90 minutes; much to their chagrin they discovered that snow had fallen in the night. They dressed, crawled back to bed and hid once more under the bedclothes.

Eventually, footsteps were heard, the door opened, there was a quick check with the flashlight, the door closed, and the footsteps receded. George Haas jumped out of bed, dashed to the window and looked out; the guards were clustered by the gate awaiting their relief.

Over the Wire.

There was a whirlwind of activity in the hut; beds were stuffed, the ladder and a rope brought out. There were brief goodbyes, and immediately Col. Reybold and Lt. Blacker were passing the various items through the window. By the time George Haas was out of the window, Ed. Clark already had the ladder in position and was on top of the wall pushing aside the barbed wire. At any moment they expected to hear shots heralding failure, but all went with unexpected smoothness and very little noise. George was caught briefly by the wire but soon worked himself free and dropped to the outside; they set off through the bushes, keeping low but moving quickly. They passed a picket fence bordering the road, and walked downhill towards the eastern side of St. Helier.

Walking briskly, the reached Havres-des-Pas making for the residence of Mr. George Laurens at 'Saltaugh' Samarès, some 3 miles or so from the camp – the second link in the chain. The roads were almost deserted at that time of the morning, and they only saw one civilian, and, later, one German, neither of whom even glanced at the two muffled figures in their civilian overcoats.

Changing their route slightly to avoid a gun position, they followed the track of the German 60cm gauge railway to the east which more or less led them to their destination, which they reached at about 8 a.m.

After arousing the Laurens family and stating who they were, the two Americans were taken into the house and given hot tea and scones; however, on seeing that their presence was causing some alarm, and not wishing to implicate the family, Ed. and George decided to sleep rough in a hedge near the house; the family told them that they would leave food for them near an incinerator at the rear of the house at 7.30 p.m.

The two escapees excavated a rudimentary slit trench and camouflaged themselves with dead leaves and brambles, but as the day progressed, they became cold, wet, and hungry. The Laurens, including their son Oscar, managed to visit them, bringing a flask of hot soup, a blanket and a change of socks; they also brought the unwelcome news that the Germans were searching the area and that anyone found giving the Americans shelter would be liable to the death penalty.

The weather the next day – Tuesday – was clear, and they heard children playing nearby; there were two narrow escapes – once when a dog sniffed at them and whined, and another when workmen appeared nearby and began to trim the hedges for firewood, the latter operation finishing only twenty yards away from their hide-out.

They returned to the incinerator again that night where, as promised, food was again waiting; the Laurens also supplied them with civilian hats, a compass, a large pocket knife and another map. Ed. and George decided that the time had come to press on, and, in order to maintain security, declined to say where they were heading.

Through the snow, which had returned, they made their way eastwards, using the inner roads, for some four miles, until they reached Fauvic, and what was to be the final link in the escape chain – 'East Lynne', the farm belonging to Deputy W.J. Bertram, whose cousin T.C. Bertram, another farmer, had been responsible for helping in most of the escape attempts during the past few months from Fauvic, and whose house 'Bellair' was a mere hundred or so yards away.

Wilfred Bertram's welcome was so re-assuring. "You must be the two Americans – come in and meet the family." Ed. and George were introduced to the others in the household, which included his brother Charley, two elderly female relatives and 20 year old John Bertram, a nephew from Canada who had been caught in Jersey at the start of the Occupation. Fried eggs and potatoes and hot milk were provided for the two travellers, after which they had a hot shave and general clean-up, warmed themselves in front of a welcome open fireplace, and listened to the clandestine radio news from the B.B.C., the first authoritative information they had heard since being taken prisoner.

Although Wilfred Bertram, better known as 'Bill', offered them a bed for the night, the Americans declined, knowing the penalty for harbouring them, and not wishing to jeopardise the safety of the family, but asking if they could be supplied with food until the weather settled down, when it might be possible to obtain a boat; this was readily agreed, and George and Ed. were given blankets and shown a hayrick near the house, where they settled down for the night.

Next morning, before daylight, Bill took the two along to an empty house opposite his cousin's farm, 'Mon Repos', the property of Capt. A. Woodrow, who had been deported to Germany in 1942, and who had left the key with the Bertrams; the thinking was that as the farm at 'East Lynne' was always being 'invaded' by Germans either on official business or looking for anything they could get in the way of food, it would be politic for the escapees to remain indoors all day sleeping and resting, and, at night, to return to the farm where they would receive a good meal, prepared by the ladies of the household, and pass the night. To provide an alibi in case of capture, a window was forced to make it appear that the Americans had broken into the house.

Thus the pattern was set, during which time Ed. and George were planning, watching the sea and the weather, while Bill canvassed his friends for a boat. Eventually one was promised, and the final link in the escape chain was planned provisionally for Wednesday 16 January.

Sadly, based on the rumour that the Germans were checking on the whereabouts of small boats, the owner of the promised craft changed his mind and Bill became uneasy. Ed. and George felt that they had imposed on the Bertrams for long enough; they considered giving themselves up, but it then occurred to them that an escape from Gorey harbour, situated about two miles up the coast, and where several boats were still in the water, might be feasible, despite the presence of guards and bunkers.

At first, Bill thought the plan to be too dangerous, but eventually agreed to help and brought oars, rowlocks and canvas to muffle their sound. Eventually they were on their way, carrying their bulky parcel. They reached the Gorey harbour area and hid in the shadow of the sea wall; they heard the voices of the German guards, but, keeping to the dark patches, they climbed over the wall, and, following the ebbing tide, they found themselves beneath the hulls of several small German coasters which had been laid up in the harbour for lack of fuel.

By now they were up to their waists in water which was so cold that it caused intense pain, but, to their dismay, they were unable to find any rowing boats. A strong wind sprang up and, with sinking hearts, they began to retrace their steps; after an hour in the sea, it was much too cold to sleep outside, and the only answer appeared to be to give themselves up.

Heading back to the sea wall they came across a cabin cruiser grounded in the mud, and, on a sudden inspiration, they boarded the boat by way of the anchor chain and broke into the cabin. Although the interior was in a mess with the bilges full of water, they managed to settle down for what was left of the night. After some discussion, they decided to remain on the boat during the day and return to Bill's farm the next night to collect food supplies, then return once more to the boat where they could lay low and await their opportunity.

At 7.30 p.m., with the tide once more ebbing and darkness having fallen, they set off back to 'East Lynne' by way of the main road. Once again they were warmly received by the Bertrams, who gave them a meal, fresh food supplies (including some tins from Red Cross parcels which had been brought by the *Vega* a couple of weeks previously), and more warm clothes. They stayed longer than intended, and left once again for Gorey with only an hour to spare before curfew at 10 p.m.

After huddling under the sea wall, they once more boarded the cabin cruiser, stowed the food and went to sleep with more confidence in the future. Morning broke and they checked their position and the location of guards; they also spotted a small boat about 12 ft long with a high freeboard, painted dark green, which fitted into their requirement; they also had a nasty surprise when they realised that what they had taken to be an innocent beach bungalow fifty yards away from them was, in fact, a heavily fortified concrete casement, camouflaged, and sporting an anti-tank gun!

However, by now they were more confident of their ability to creep around the harbour after dark, preparations were made for a silent departure, and all the gear was stowed near the cabin door including a bailing pump which they had found in the cabin.

At 9.30 p.m., with a slight breeze blowing and the tide flowing, they decided to make a move. They lowered their gear over the side, made their way to the small boat, quietly climbed in and waited for the tide to float them off the mud; they discovered a tiller and rudder on board, very fortunately as it happened, as this find was later to save their lives.

When the sea had lifted the boat off the mud, George cut the anchor lines, and Ed. started rowing. As they passed close to the pier-head, the moon came out, and both occupants felt as conspicuous as the 'Queen Mary', but luck was with them, and they were not seen by the sentries on the harbour.

It was tough going having to row against the incoming tide, and, being out of condition, Ed. Clark was soon exhausted. The sea state worsened and it was impossible to keep to their planned course, as this would have placed them beam on to the waves and they would have easily been swamped; they therefore shipped the oars and used the rudder to keep the boat facing the oncoming waves. The wind dropped and they could see Mont Orgueil Castle fading into the distance; their troubles, however, were still not over, as they were suddenly overwhelmed by the worst gale and blizzard that either of them had ever experienced.

The waves came from all directions and many times they thought that their last moment had come. With mountainous seas, lashed by snow and icy winds, they were drenched and almost frozen to death.

Fortunately, the wind suddenly abated, making the boat easier to handle, and land was sighted about two or three miles away, a great boost to the morale, but they were unable to angle the boat towards the shore, as the waves and wind were carrying them parallel to the land and in a southerly direction. The boat began to ship water again, and they re-doubled their efforts with the bailing pump; this soon became clogged as it sucked up their supply of biscuits which by now had become a soggy mess floating in the bottom of the boat.

Seeing the top of a lighthouse, they became concerned about the possibility of rocks and, on landing, the danger of minefields. Suddenly the shore was only 200 yards away; the beach was smooth and sandy, but they feared the breakers would overturn their boat, and George stripped off his outer clothing to prepare to swim for it. Then the impossible happened – a wave caught their tiny craft and threw it on to the beach, where they rolled out in a few inches of water, and quickly took shelter behind a sand dune.

Figures came running towards them and a shot whined over their heads. It was a patrol of U.S. troops led by a Lieutenant who stopped 50 yards distant and ordered them to come forward with their hands above their heads. Ed and George shouted that they were Americans, but the Lieutenant refused to believe them, and thought they might be spies! They were taken to the Command Post, supported between two G.I.s and given hot coffee to drink, while their clothing was dried out before a roaring fire. Having asked the time, they realised that they had been at sea for 15 hours and had covered 25 miles, landing at Coutances.

They were taken to hospital at Cherbourg and later to Normandy Base Section for interrogation. Their travels ended in Paris with a return to duty, before their eventual return to the United States in April 1945. George Haas was able to post the letter to Mrs. Blacker that he had carried from her husband who, at this time, was still in Jersey.

So ended a successful and unique episode in the records of Escapes from the Island, made possible only by the links forged between the escapees and members of the local civilian population, in particular the young Charles Gruchy, the Laurens family, and, finally, the redoubtable Bill Bertram and his family at 'East Lynne'.

Postscript

After the war, Colonel Reybold was able to tell Ed. and George that the plan of stuffing the bedclothes had worked even better than anticipated. At 8.30 a.m. the corporal of the guard had entered the hut, glanced at the Colonel and Lt. Blacker sitting around, asked if Clark and Haas were sleeping and walked out again. At 10 a.m. he returned, checked, mentioned the fact of the two sleeping late and began to leave. Suddenly, he became suspicious, and although the Colonel tried to reassure him, the corporal went over and peeped under the blankets of Haas's bed. His jaw dropped, and he dashed out in such an excited state that Capt. Clark's absence was not noticed for another two hours! Furthermore, to cover his own inefficiency, the corporal told his superiors that he had seen the two Americans at 8.30.a.m. Thus the Germans were under the impression that they had only been out for $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours and must be somewhere in the vicinity of the camp..

The escape boat.

The small boat taken by Ed. and George was, in fact, the property of the Gorey harbourmaster, Mr. L. Godfray, who, following the successful escape, had to satisfy the Germans that he had not been involved or implicated in any way!

George C. Haas.

In 1947, George Haas went into business in the United States, firstly selling aircraft, then joined the Coca Cola Company; he married in 1948, moved to the Pepsi Cola Company until 1960, by which time he was the National Sales Manager. He then started his own financial business, the Haas Financial Corporation, specialising in the soft drink industry and financing of aircraft. He has three daughters, all married. He now lives in retirement in Florida, U.S.A.

Edward R. Clark.

Ed. Clark remained in the American Army after the war, transferring to the Air Force, retiring in December 1963 in the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He then worked as City Manager of a small town near Riverside, California, eventually retiring to Alpine, Texas, U.S.A.

Wilfred. J. Bertram.

On 9 May, 1946, the first anniversary of Liberation Day, at a ceremony in the People's Park, St. Helier, General Drexel Biddle, on behalf of General Eisenhower, decorated Bill Bertram with the American Medal of Freedom for his part in aiding the escape of Lt. Haas and Capt. Clark. (see Appendix 'F' for Citation).

On 4 September 1946, the British Government recognised his services by awarding him the British Empire Medal; he died on 25 February 1953 in his 62nd year.

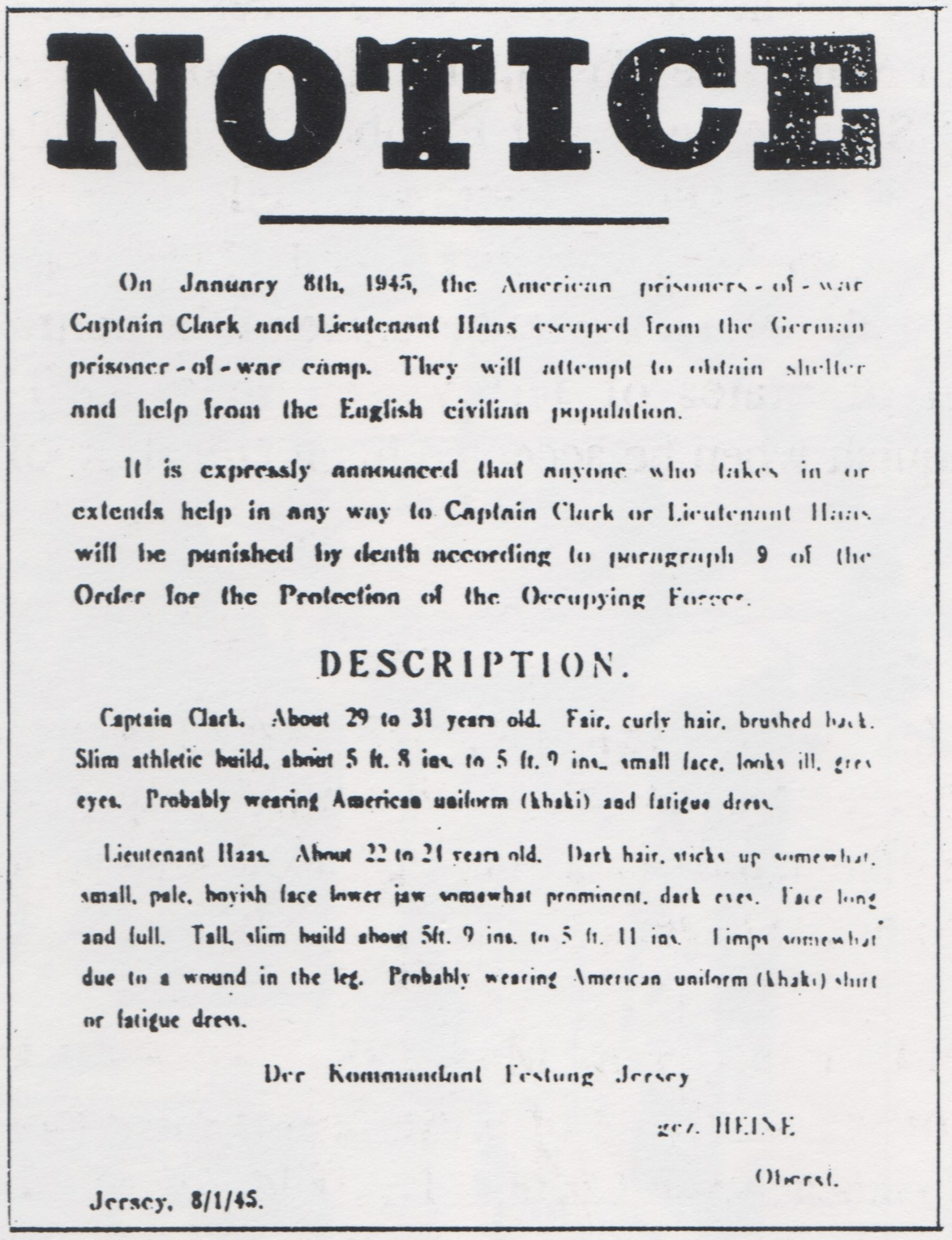
Charles Gruchy.

Charles was eventually released from the Gloucester Street prison on 5 May 1945, together with Martin Le Cornu, and other 'political' prisoners. In 1946, Charles read for a Science degree at Edinburgh University and, at the same time, studied at the Royal (Dick) Veterinary College for his M.R.C.V.S. He graduated in 1951, returned to Jersey and joined a local practice, from which he retired in 1982 when his son took over his share of the partnership. He retained his part-time post of States of Jersey Veterinary Officer which he was compelled to relinquish when he accepted his nomination of Jurat of the Royal Court in 1986.

Martin Le Cornu.

Charles Gruchy's fellow 'political' prisoner worked for many post-war years with the North Thames Gas Board, travelling widely giving lectures on his subject. Sadly, he died some years ago, just as he was approaching retirement and was planning to return to Jersey.

At a Reunion held in Jersey in May 1985, the 45th anniversary of the Liberation, many of the survivors of those far-off days met together; amongst the visitors from overseas were Colonel Reybold, George Haas and Ed. Clark, who had travelled from the U.S.A. with their families for this truly memorable occasion. (See Appendix 'G').



NOTICE

On January 8th, 1945, the American prisoners-of-war Captain Clark and Lieutenant Haas escaped from the German prisoner-of-war camp. They will attempt to obtain shelter and help from the English civilian population.

It is expressly announced that anyone who takes in or extends help in any way to Captain Clark or Lieutenant Haas will be punished by death according to paragraph 9 of the Order for the Protection of the Occupying Forces.

DESCRIPTION.

Captain Clark. About 29 to 31 years old. Fair, curly hair, brushed back. Slim athletic build, about 5 ft. 8 ins. to 5 ft. 9 ins., small face, looks ill, grey eyes. Probably wearing American uniform (khaki) and fatigue dress.

Lieutenant Haas. About 22 to 24 years old. Dark hair, sticks up somewhat, small, pale, boyish face lower jaw somewhat prominent, dark eyes. Face long and full. Tall, slim build about 5ft. 9 ins. to 5 ft. 11 ins. Limps somewhat due to a wound in the leg. Probably wearing American uniform (khaki) shirt or fatigue dress.

Der Kommandant Festung Jersey

gez. HEINE

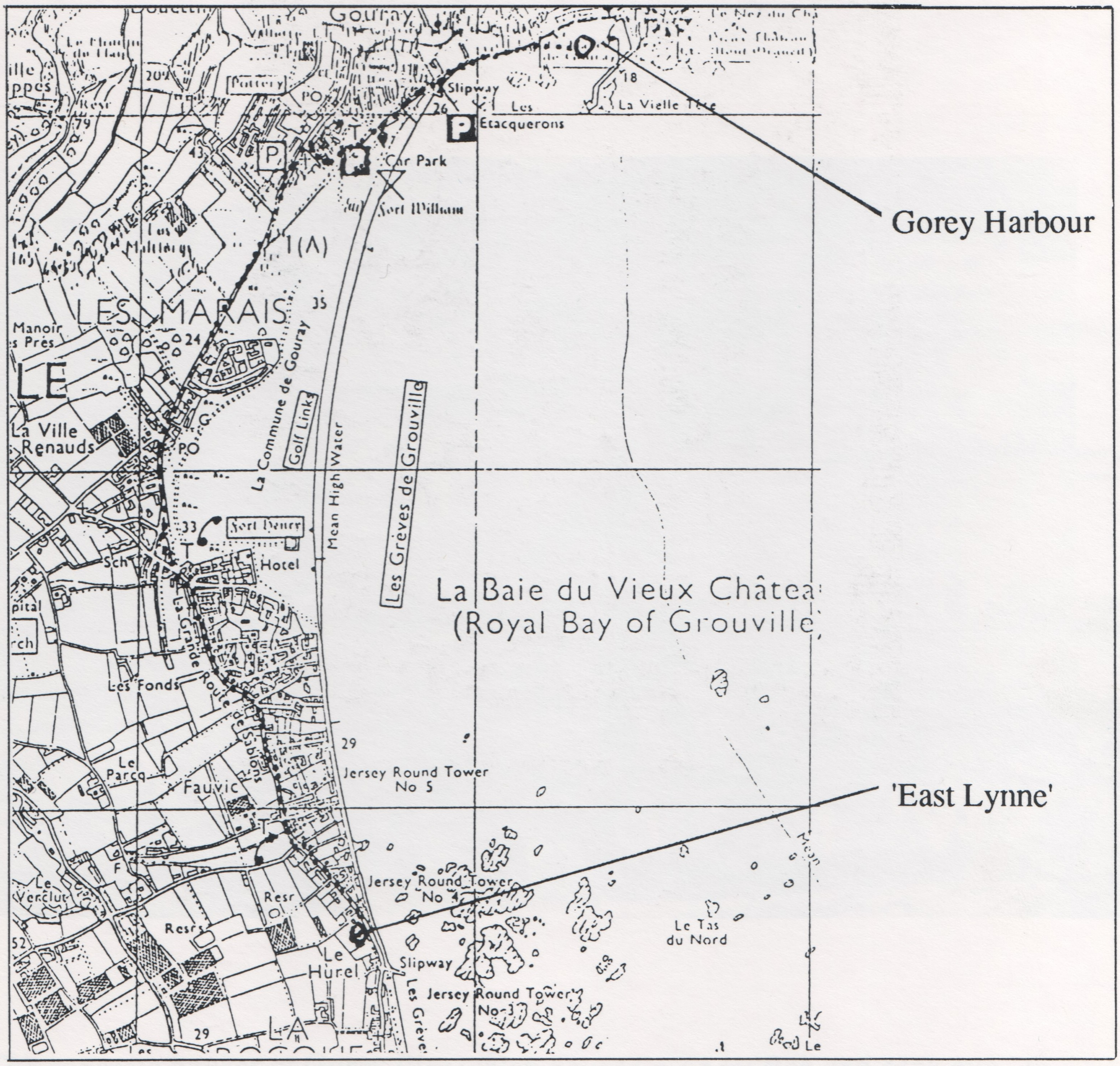
Oberst.

Jersey, 8/1/45.

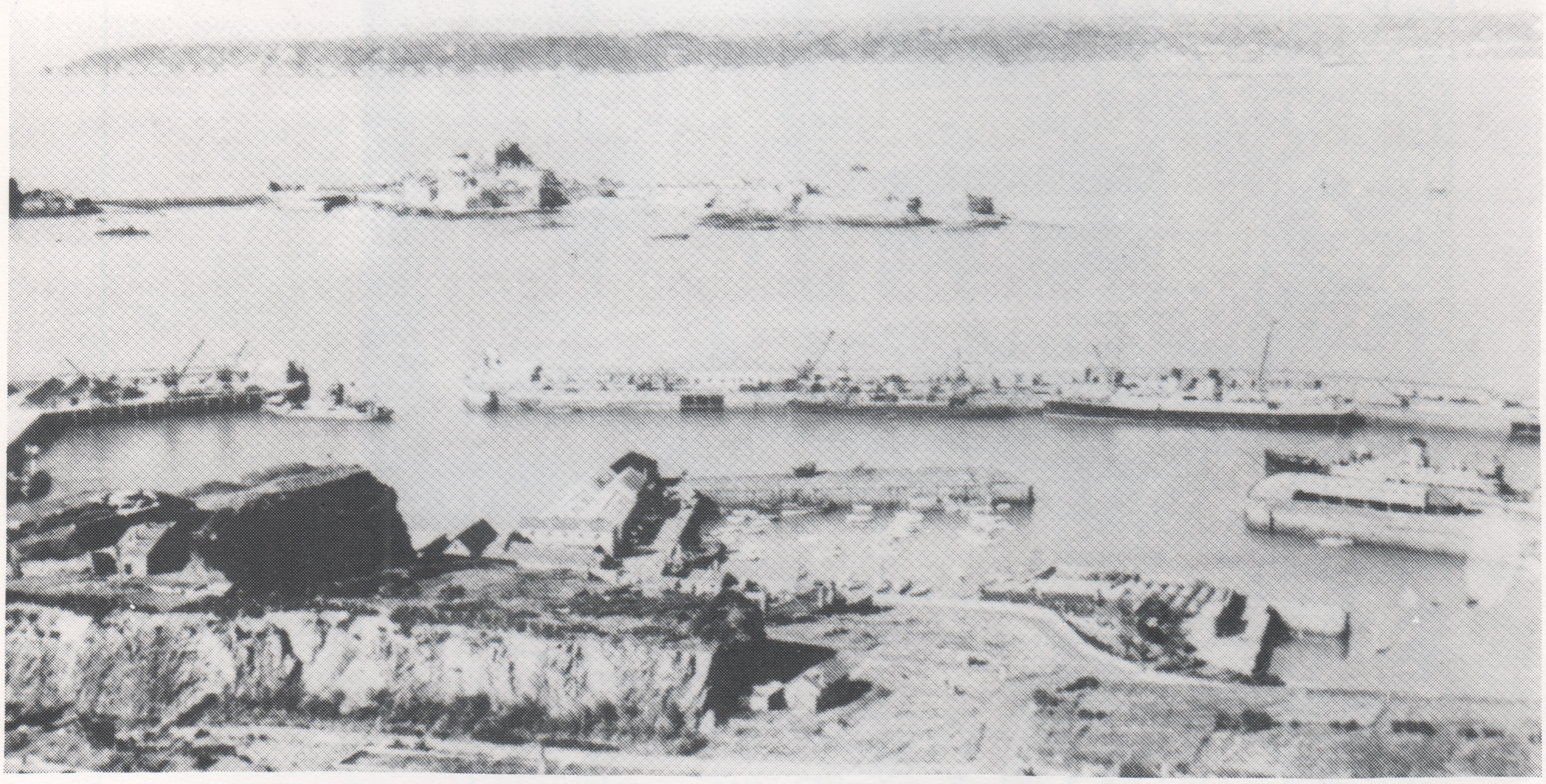
German poster announcing the escape of two American officers and warning of dire penalties for anyone caught helping them

An early wartime photograph of Lieut (later Capt.) Ed. Clark

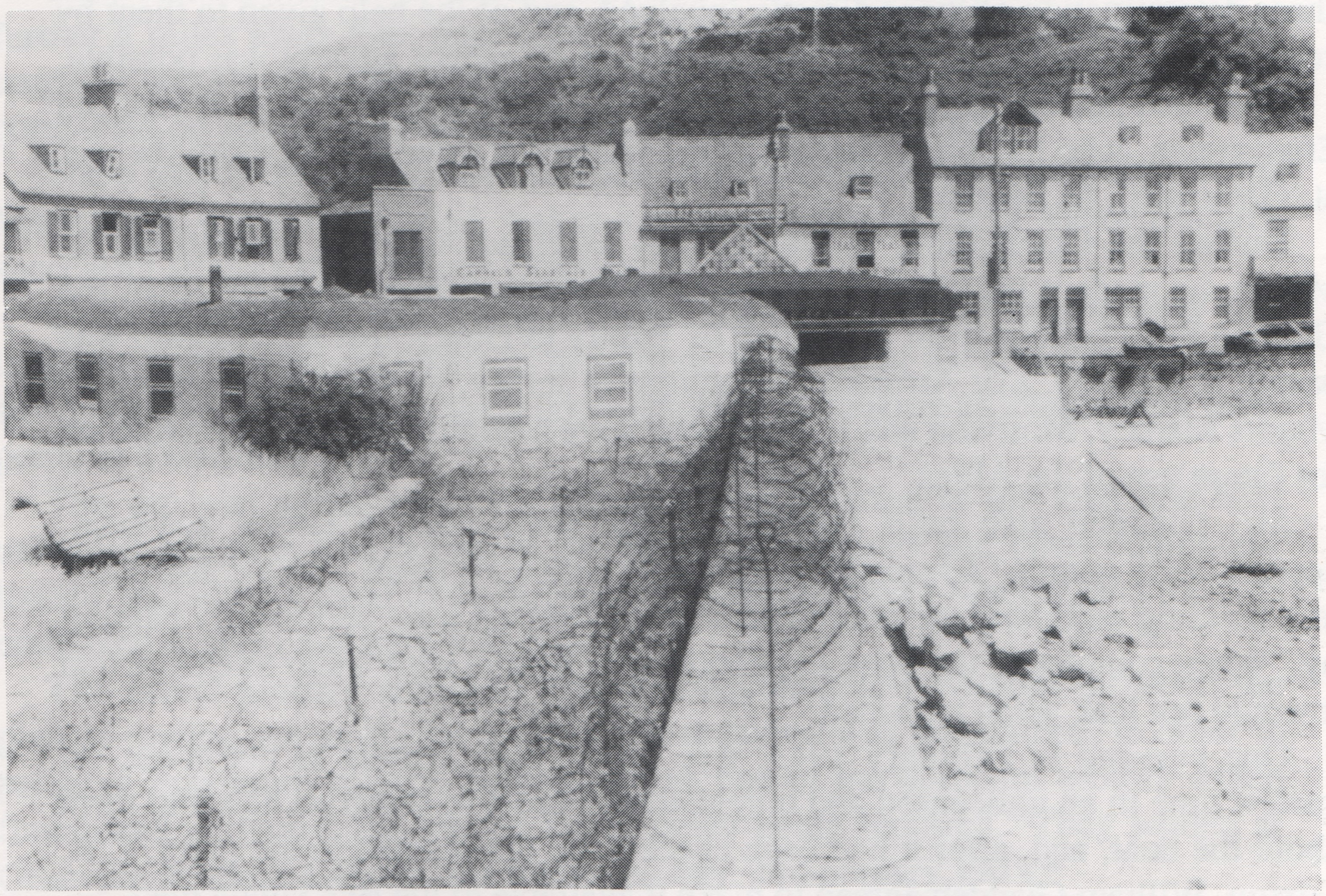
Lieut. George Haas


Gorey Harbour
'East Lynne'
Gouray
Slipway
Les Etacquerons
La Vielle Tête
Car Park
Fort William
Pottery
LES MARAIS
Manoir des Prés
La Ville Renauds
La Commune de Gouray
Golf Links
Mean High Water
Les Grèves de Grouville
Fort Henry
Hotel
La Grande Route des Sablons
La Baie du Vieux Château
(Royal Bay of Grouville)
Les Fonds
Le Parcq
Fauvic
Jersey Round Tower No 5
Jersey Round Tower No 4
Jersey Round Tower No 3
Le Tas du Nord
Le Hurel
Slipway
Resr
Le Verclut

The probable route taken by Capt. Ed. Clark and Lieut. George Haas from 'East Lynne' to Gorey Harbour



Aerial view of South Hill, St. Helier, in 1946. The foundations of the P.O.W. camp can be seen just left of centre at the bottom of the picture. Today, this area is used to train and test learner drivers.



The concrete bunker at Gorey Pier which housed a 7.5cm Pak anti-tank gun. In the course of their escape, Capt Clark and Lieut. Haas thought that the building was an innocent seaside bungalow

CHAPTER 16

Five More Away

René Havard, C.A. Luxton, J. Foster & P. and J. Le Gallais

Just over a month following the successful escape by the two American officers came one of the last recorded attempts on 23 February 1945, when five young men made their effort, and the background in itself illustrates, yet again, the sheer determination of those directly involved, and of the help given to them by certain local inhabitants, without whose support no escape attempt was possible.

One such person was a building contractor, William Gladden, a 70 year old Englishman, who had been resident in the island for some years before the war at 'Glencairn', St. Martin.

During the Occupation, in his capacity as Head Air Raid warden for St. Martin, he made it his business to obtain all the information possible about the German fortifications from the Parish of Trinity to Gorey; this information was passed to the H.Q.'s of Air Raid Precautions in Jersey, where it was collated by Majors Manley, Morrison and L'Amy, who were compiling all such intelligence for future use of the Allies.

Mr. Gladden also built boats, and one such craft, a strong sea-boat, appropriately named '*Adventure*' – 12ft long with a 5ft beam – was constructed in a building adjoining the main road where Germans were continually passing by. When completed, the boat was continually soaked with water to ensure that it would not leak when launched.

One evening in February 1945, five young men arrived at his house on curfew time in an unlicensed and unregistered Ford V8; someone had told them about the boat, and, after it had been checked by the seaman in the party, C.A. Luxton, William Gladden agreed to make it available to the five young men.

Transport posed a major problem, as not only had the boat to be moved from St. Martin to the popular embarkation point at Fauvic, but also two outboard motors and petrol, which had been obtained for the trip, had to be moved from René Havard's house in West Park Avenue, St. Helier.

Someone had heard of a farmer, Charlie Biles, who had an old horse-drawn furniture van, which was kept at his Pomme d'Or farm at Bellozanne, a mile or so to the west of St. Helier; Mr. Biles, on being approached, agreed to lend them the van, but was unable to supply a horse, so the five lusty youngsters, probably fortified by contents from their recently received Red Cross parcels, decided to accept the inevitable, and pull the van themselves!

Therefore, in daylight on 23 February, the quintet push-pulled the furniture van from Bellozanne to West Park Avenue, where the two motors, petrol, and other equipment were loaded on, thence to William Gladden's house at St. Martin, a distance of about 3 or so miles – mostly uphill; once there, they had a meal from their parcels, following which they loaded the boat on to the van, covering it with a tarpaulin; look-outs were maintained during this operation, but no Germans appeared; the weather was calm and slightly foggy and the roads deserted.

They left St. Martin at about 7.15p.m., and made their way to Fauvic, a further 4 miles away, one man between the shafts, the others pushing, and all laughing and joking. This hilarity continued throughout the journey, which was completed on arrival at the Bertram residence at 'Bellair', Fauvic.

There they were received by the usual local 'reception party', including Colin Marie, who, it will be recalled, was one of those instrumental in Victor Huelin's successful attempt the previous October.

Colin remembered that it was a foggy night and hearing loud talking and laughing coming towards them in the gloom, then seeing the covered van being slowly dragged along "with the fellows laughing and joking as though they were going to a carnival".

The van was pulled on to the common land adjacent to the road, the boat unloaded and man-handled on to the beach, the engines and other equipment loaded, including a sheaf of intelligence supplied by Major Manley, and the five embarked at approximately 8.45 p.m.

The actual journey across to France was completely without incident; the plan of rowing out to sea for a considerable period was maintained, in order to preserve maximum silence, before starting one of the outboard motors which functioned perfectly, the second motor never being required. They landed at Granville at about 4.45p.m. the following day, 24 February,1945.*

The arrival procedure followed the pattern set after all previous attempts; the Americans, after questioning the party, fed them and took them to Cherbourg, where they were handed over to the British authorities; they were then transported to Southampton, further questioning by Immigration, thence to the War Office in London, where they handed over the papers entrusted to them.

The quintet then split up, four of them having family and friends in the north of England, while René Havard, whose fortunes we now follow, went to Cosham, where his father, Paul, who was serving in the Royal Navy, was billeted in a house of an ex-Jersey friend, a Mr. Poingdestre; a memorable reunion took place, with René bringing news of his mother back in Jersey, and of conditions in the island generally.

Whilst awaiting to join the Services, René was also billeted with the Poingdestres, and obtained employment with the M.O.T. as a driver. At Christmas time 1945, he returned to Jersey, where the whole family was re-united for the first time in seven years. René joined the Army in January 1946 as a driver in the R.A.S.C.; part of his 2½ years service was spent in France, where he met his future wife, Marie-Louise, whom he married in March 1948; they settled in England, and raised a family of three sons and a daughter, and now have four grand-children and one great grand-daughter.

René has made a number of return visits to his native island over the years since, perhaps two of the most memorable being on 24 June 1948 when, as one of those successful escapees, he was invited by the States of Jersey to be presented to H.R.H. The Duchess of Kent at Mont Orgueil Castle, and, the following year, on 22 June 1949, at the Howard Davis Park, he again joined his fellow escapees when he was presented to the then H.R.H. The Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh.

Finally, the name of the Havard household in Newhaven, East Sussex, must constantly recall in René's mind memories of a very particular personal event in his lifetime which occurred nearly fifty years ago ... FAUVIC'.

A post-war reminiscence by William Gladden recalled that at 8 a.m. on 24 February 1945, a boat was sighted a few miles out from St. Catherine, making for the Ecréhous, in the direction of Carteret, and flying a flag; there was a flagstaff on the boat, and, before they left St. Martin the previous evening, the boys had said they would fly the flag when they thought it safe to do so.

Another recorded incident occurred at 8 p.m. on the same day when, according to Mr. Gladden, a pre-arranged 'success' signal was given from the French coast; he went to a vantage point at Anne Port at the time stated, but the weather was hazy, and the arranged six 'flashes' of light could not be seen; however, dead on time, there was a distant 'boom', followed by five further explosions at one minute intervals.

Having being satisfied that these were the signals denoting the safe arrival of the party, William Gladden walked to St. Helier and back the following day to inform the mother of one of the boys of his safe arrival in France, thus alleviating her, and other parents, of the constant worry with the next-of-kin of every escapee.

René Havard, taken from his Jersey Identity Card

The brothers Le Gallais (l.) Joe, (r.) Philip

CHAPTER 17

The Fauvic Embarkation Point

As this book draws to a close, it would be an unforgivable omission not to devote this last chapter to a group of remarkable individuals who, with apparently little thought for their own safety and well being, were prepared to offer help to the many potential escapees who used a particular stretch of beach which became known as the 'Fauvic Embarkation Point', en route to their ultimate goal, the coastline of France.

To avoid the possibility of the activities being compromised with dire results for all those involved – a situation which was, happily, never realised – no records were ever kept of the precise numbers and dates of departure from Fauvic. After the Liberation in May 1945, however, it was estimated that at least 50 individuals used this escape route between the late summer of 1944 and February 1945, and the ultimate fortunes of 39 of these have been recounted in the preceding chapters of this book.

Any escape or attempted escape would not have been possible without essential 'back-up', and we now turn to those whose names have appeared within these pages and who will always be associated with the facilities of the 'Fauvic Port'. One family name is synonymous with these exploits – the name of Bertram.

Deputy Wilfred ('Bill') Bertram lived at "East Lynne", a farm bordering the sea shore. He was a bachelor in his early 50's and a veteran of World War I, when he had fought with the 24th Canadian Rifle Brigade, being wounded twice in action. He lived with his 43 year old brother Charley, two elderly ladies, his sister Clarice and cousin Mrs. Gladys Blampied, and nephew 20 year old John Bertram. They will be remembered primarily for their unstinting support in the successful escape of the two American Servicemen in January 1945.

Thomas Bertram, Wilfred's cousin, together with his wife Emily, son Ronald, daughter-in-law Ida, and daughter, Mrs. Eileen Hughes, lived at 'Bellair' – 50 or so yards to the north of 'East Lynne', on the beach side of the coast road, directly opposite a cart track which lead out of a field adjacent to the Deputy's farm. 'Bellair' was boarded on one side by open common land and on the other by Fauvic Tower, the residence of Mrs. M.A. Ching.

Tom Bertram might be described as the 'Harbourmaster of the Fauvic Port', as it was to 'Bellair' that many of the escape groups came, and where those awaiting their time for embarkation on cold nights in a shed which had been placed at their disposal, would have received much welcomed hot drinks supplied by Emily Bertram and Eileen Hughes.

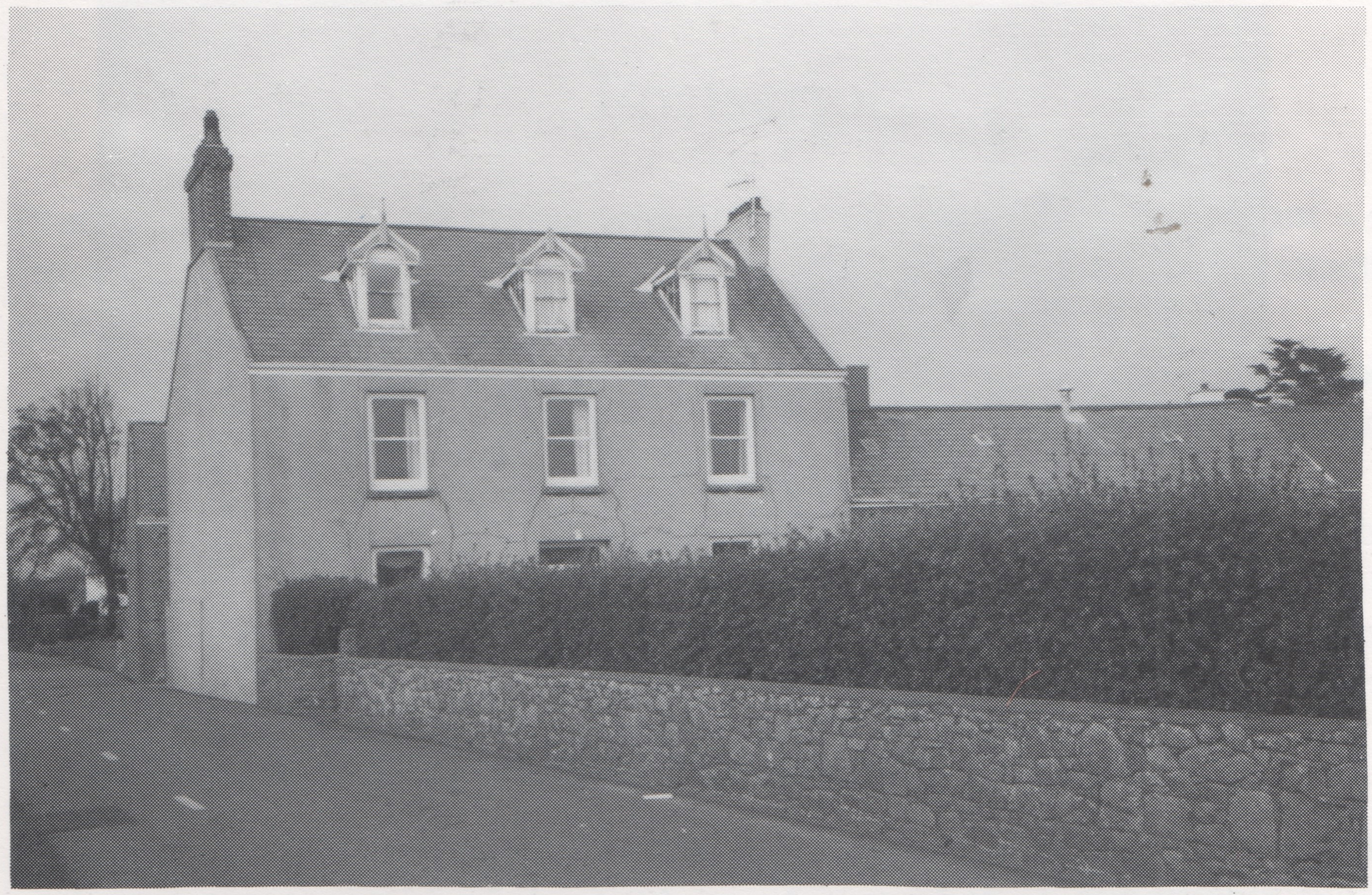
There were also a number of individuals in the immediate vicinity who offered generous support in all the escapes, amongst whom were Colin Marie, of 'The Cottage', Fauvic, P.G. Cabot, Syd Le Clercq – a fisherman from La Rocque whose intimate knowledge of the rocks and tides was invaluable, as was the advice of Len Le Cuirot; Ted Le Gros of the Jersey Motor Works, Pontac, who tuned many of the engines at his workshop; those who supplied transport to move boats, engines and equipment to Fauvic included Bertram Payn, Dennis Ryan, A.C. Halliwell and Arthur Marett; Charlie Biles who lent his furniture van which was push-pulled from Bellozanne to Fauvic via St. Helier and St. Martin, where the boat supplied by William Gladden was picked up and taken to 'Bellair'.

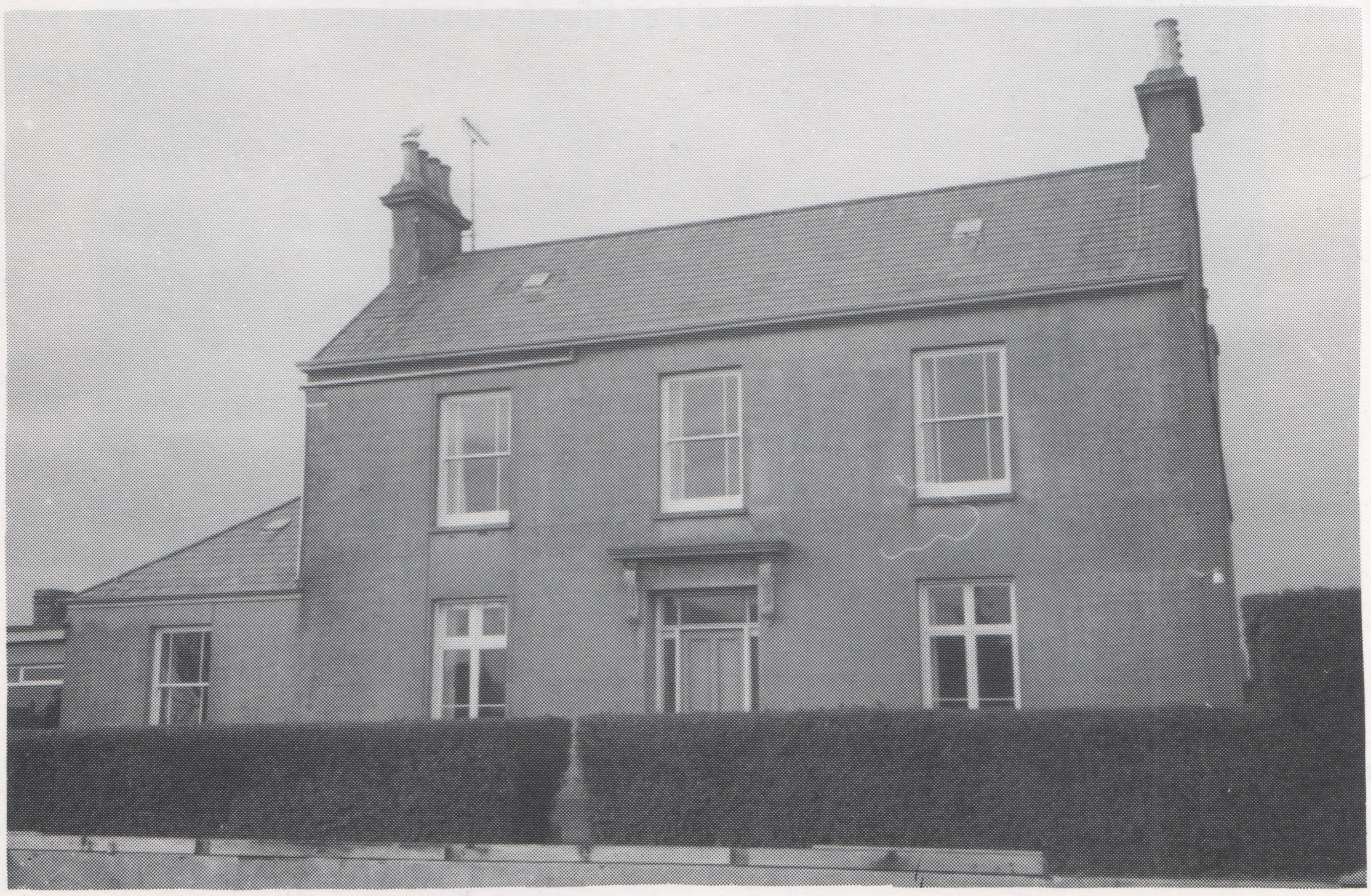
Apart from vital information supplied by local fishermen on sea-lore and navigation, one must not forget the advice given to many parties by the Company of Town Pilots such as Peter Guiton, Ted Larbalestier and Silver Le Riche, to mention but three.

One must not forget, either, those who provided shelter and 'safe' houses; all known families and individuals have been mentioned in preceding chapters, but full acknowledgement is now made to the many other unnamed and unknown locals who cheerfully accepted the risks they ran, not once, but many times, in order that young people might get away to help their Country and take information with them which might be of value to the Allies.

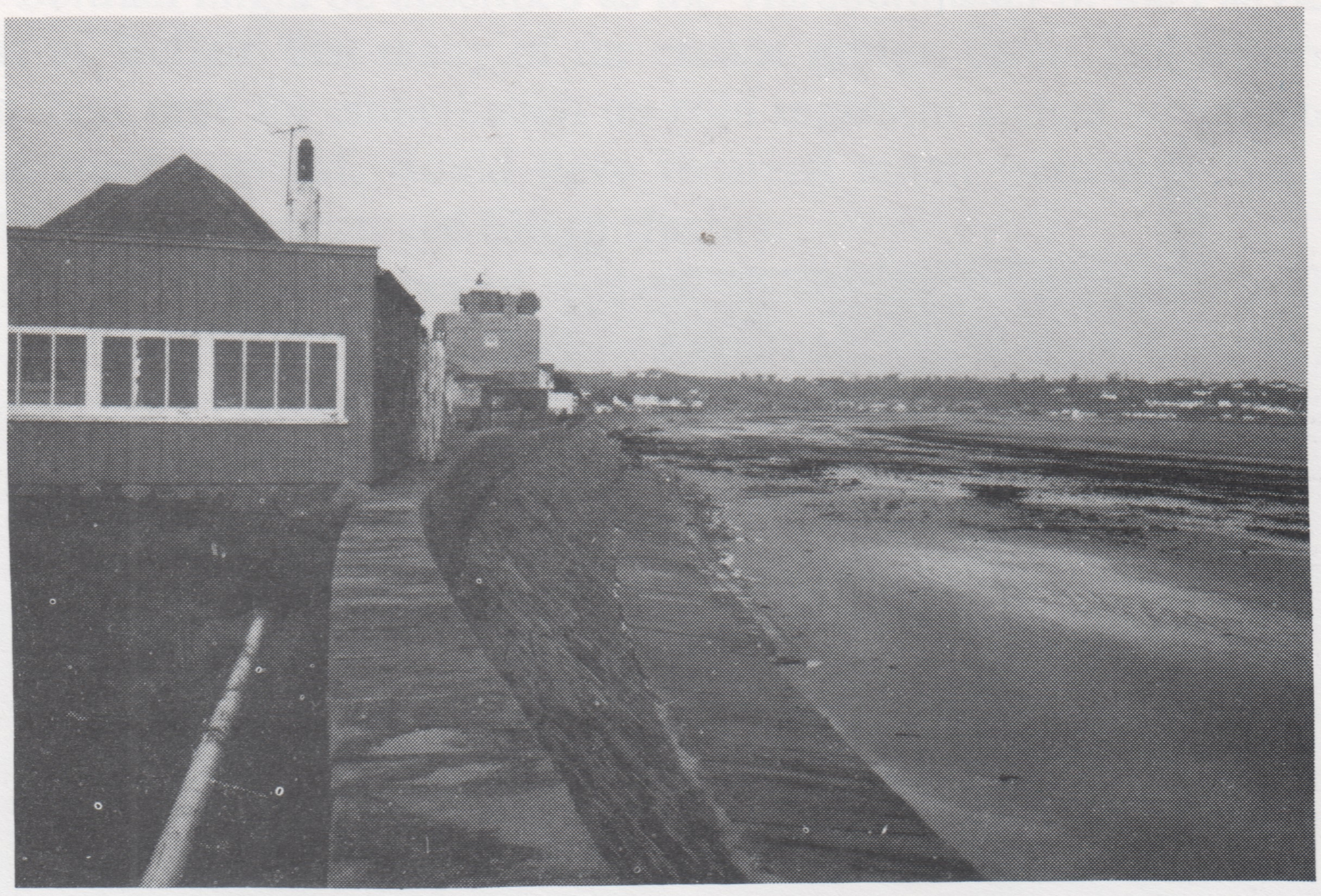
Finally, one small anecdote from Wilfred Bertram is worth recording. During an interview with the Jersey Evening Post in late May 1945, he was asked if there had been any fear of informers. His reply was..." No, not at all. I am glad to say that in this little area (Fauvic), they are all 100% British, and though many people must have known or suspected that something was going on, no one was ever given away.."

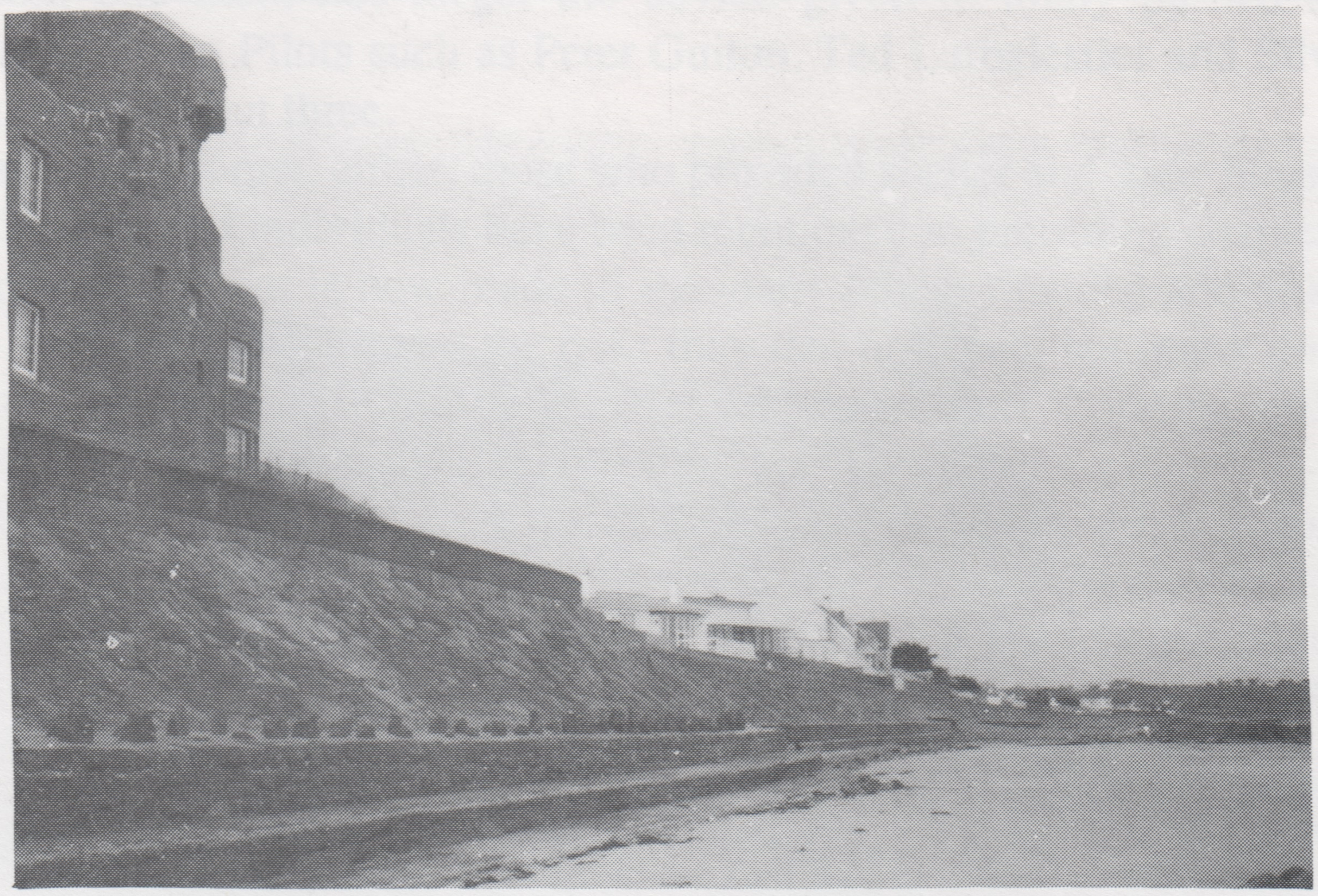
Today, 'Bellair' and 'East Lynne' are the only tangible reminders of the 'Fauvic Embarkation Point'; the open common land between these houses has been in-filled with bungalows and houses, and all other traces of those momentous occasions have disappeared, but the minds of those involved must still record, with justifiable pride and pleasure, the contribution they made to the events which occurred nearly 50 years ago in this small area of the Island.





(top) 'Bellair', (bottom) 'East Lynne'





Recent photographs showing the point of embarkation from Fauvic, which was the far (north) side of the Round Tower. Today the area is much built-up but, during the war a rough track ran from near 'Bellair' to the sea wall over which the boats were man-handled. This was no easy task at night under Occupation conditions.

Postscript

Producing this book on events which occurred so long ago has meant – apart from speaking to those who are still resident in Jersey – tracing and contacting a number of people who now live in four of the five Continents.

The response to this world-wide research over two years has been eminently fascinating and thoroughly absorbing; many pertinent details and anecdotes have come to light and are recorded for the very first time.

The generous and forthcoming response by many of the participants to my enquiries was possibly in some way due to the fact that we all shared the same Alma Mater pre-war, Victoria College, Jersey. Many grateful thanks are due, not only to them, but also to all those people I have met either through correspondence or face-to-face, for their generous contributions.

It is hoped that the contents within these pages will be regarded as a fitting and permanent record of the exploits of a number of remarkable men and women – many of whom in those days were still in their 'teens' – and of whom we who live in this Island should not only feel proud, but whom we should also never forget ...

APPENDIX A.

THE ESCAPEES.

This list has been compiled over many years by the curator of the German Underground Hospital, St. Peter, Mr. Joe Miere. *-Escapees featured in this book.

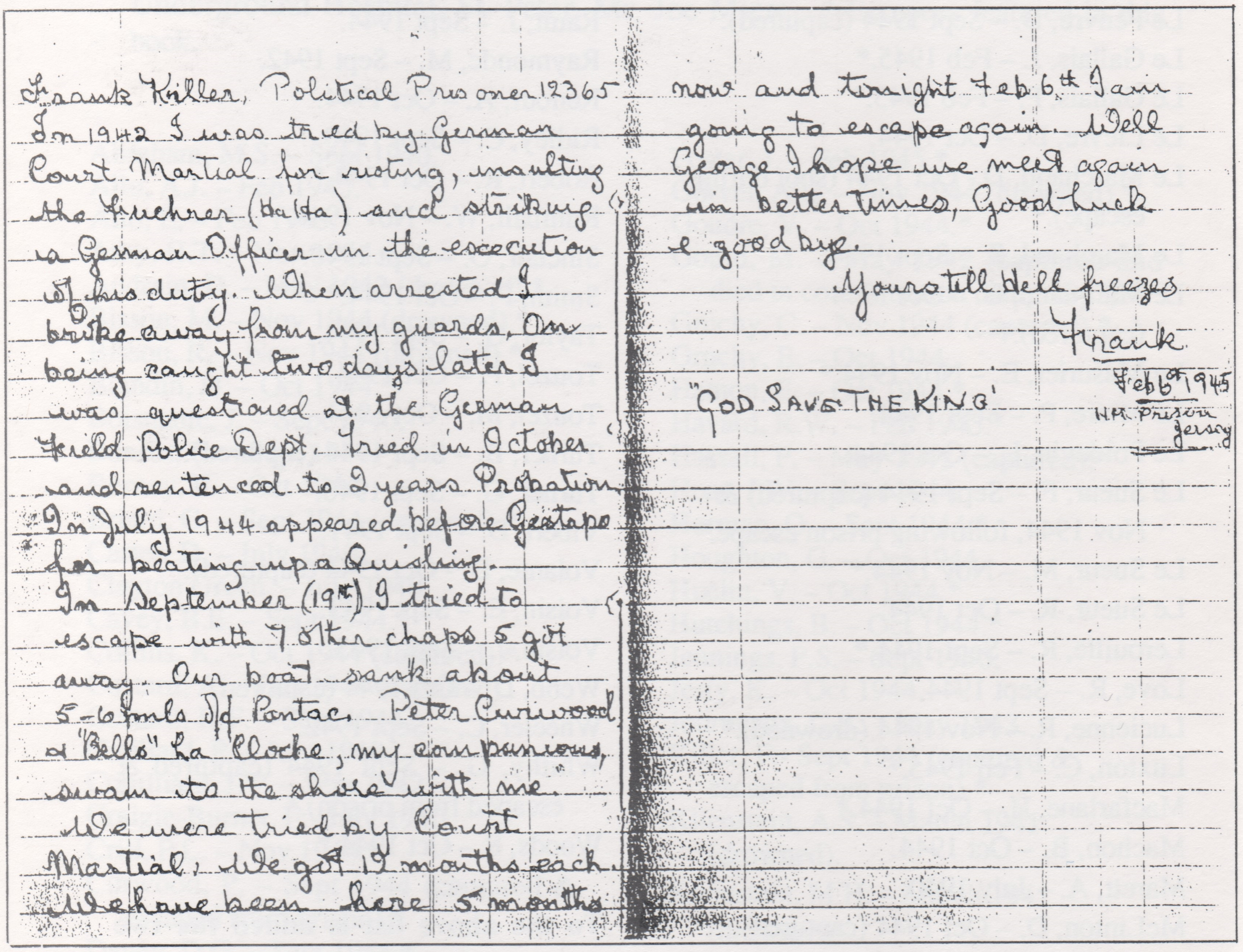
Abraham, M.S. – Sept 1940.
Allo, A.J. – Feb 1945.
Allo, E. – Feb 1945.
Amy, H.T. – Nov 1944.
Audrain, D. – May 1942 (drowned).*
Bisson, M. – Nov 1944 (drowned).*
Bisson, R. – Nov 1944 (drowned).*
Blandin, D. – Oct 1944.*
Boisnante, J. – Sept 1940.
Bondis, C. – Sept 1944.*
Borney, F. – Oct 1944.
Briard, G. – Sept 1944 (captured).*
Carter, D. – July 1940.
Clayton Green, – July 1940.
Cavey, B.E. – Sept 1944.*
Collins, K. – Oct 1944 (captured).*
Costard, A. – Oct 1944 (captured).
Costard, H.F. – Sept 1944.
Cotillard, P. – July 1940.
Couilliard, J.T. – Sept 1942.
Craigie-Burnet, F.- July 1940.
Crill, P.L. – Nov 1944.*
Curwood, P. – Sept 1944 (captured & escaped from prison).*
Davey, D.G. – Sept 1944.*
Davies, D.C. – July 1941 (captured).
Davies, T.J. – July 1941 (captured).
Deveau, F. – Sept 1940.
Deveau, J. – Sept 1940.
Deveau, W. – Sept 1940.
Desvergez, P.– Oct 1944.*
Dobson, H. – July 1941 (captured).
Floyd, J. – Nov 1944.*
Foster, J. – Feb 1945.*
Gorvel, A.L. – Nov 1944 (drowned).*
Goudre, V. – Oct 1944.*
Gould, M. – May 1942 (captured and died in concentration camp 1943).*
Gruchy, C. – Nov 1944 (captured).*
Gruchy, E. – Oct 1944.
Hamon, E. – Oct 1944.*
Havard, R.W. – Feb 1945.*
Hassall, P. – May 1942 (captured).*
Hoar, J.W. – Sept 1944.
Horman, O. – Sept 1944.*
Houghton, G. – Oct 1944.
Huelin, V. – Oct 1944.*
Hutchings, B. – Oct 1944.*
Jennings, P.S. – Sept 1940.
Jesty, K. – Oct 1944.
Journeaux, C.R. – May 1943.
Killer, F.- Sept 1944 (captured & escaped from prison).*
Klienstein, A.S. – March 1941 (drowned).
Klienstein, M.H. – March 1941 (drowned).
Kosta, S. – Sept 1944 (captured).*
La Cloche, H. – Sept 1944 (captured).*
Langley, J. – Oct 1944.*
Langlois, M. – Sept 1940.
Larbalestier, B. – Nov 1944 (drowned).*
Larbalestier, J. – Nov 1944 (drowned).*

Laurence, R. – Oct 1944 (captured).
Laurens, O. – Sept 1942.
Le Brun, B. – Sept 1944.*
Le Cornu, M. – Nov 1944 (captured).*
Le Corre, E. – Sept 1944.*
Le Couteur, G. – Nov 1944.*
Le Cuirot, D. – Oct 1944.*
Le Feuvre, D. – Sept 1944 (captured).
Le Gallais, J. – Feb 1945.*
Le Gallais, P. – Feb 1945.*
Le Lievre, D. – Oct 1944.
Le Marchand, D.- Oct 1944 (shot during escape).*
Le Marchand, S. – Sept 1944.
Le Marquand, G. – Oct 1944 (captured).*
Le Masurier, E. – Nov 1944.*
Le Miere, P. – Sept 1944.
Le Poidevin, L. – Oct 1944.
Le Sueur, F. – Sept 1944 (captured) & Nov 1944, following prison escape.*
Le Sueur, M. – Nov 1944.*
Le Sueur, R. – Oct 1944.
Lerouille, R. – Sept 1944.*
Love, R. – Sept 1944.
Lucienne, R. – Nov 1944 (drowned).*
Luxton, C. – Feb 1945.*
Macfarlane, H. – Oct 1944.*
Machon, B. – Oct 1944.
Marett, A. – July 1940.
McLinton, D. – Oct 1944 (captured).
Mourant, R. – Nov 1944.*
Neil, M. – Oct 1944 (captured).*
Newey, J. – Sept 1942.
Nicolle, F. – Sept 1942.
Noel, P. – Nov 1944 (captured).*
O'Connor, J. – Sept 1940.
Parris, K. – Nov 1944.*
Perrin, F. – Oct 1944.
Pinel, F. – Oct 1944.
Pinel, J. – Oct 1944.
Prain, E. – Nov 1944.*
Price, M. – Nov 1944.*
Queripel, R. – Nov 1944.
Queree, W. – Nov 1944.
Rault, D. – Oct 1944.
Rault, J. – Sept 1944.
Raymonde, M. – Sept 1942.
Renouf, A. – Oct 1944.
Ridley, C. – Sept 1940.
Robert, R. – Oct 1944.*
Rumball, W. – Nov 1944.*
Sinclair, O. – Sept 1940.
Smith, P. – Oct 1944.*
Taylor, G. – Sept 1944.
Touzel, F. – Oct 1944.
Touzel, M. – Oct 1944.
Turner, B. – Sept 1944 (captured).*
Turner, G. – Sept 1940.
Vibert, D. – Sept 1941.*
Volante, D. - Oct 1944 (captured).
Voisin, E. – Sept 1943.
Voisin, J. – Sept 1943.
Webb, D. – Oct 1944 (captured).
Wheeler, C. – Sept 1942.
Whithy, G. – Sept 1944 (captured & escaped from prison).*
Woods, R – Oct 1944.*

To the above list is added the two American P.O.W's:

Capt. Ed Clark*
Lieut.G.C.Haas.*
(January 1945)

Appendix B



Frank Killer, Political Prisoner 12365
In 1942 I was tried by German Court Martial for rioting, insulting the Fuehrer (Ha Ha) and striking a German Officer in the excecution Of his duty. When arrested I broke away from my guards, On being caught two days later I was questioned at the German Field Police Dept. Tried in October and sentenced to 2 years Probation. In July 1944 appeared before Gestapo for beating up a Quisling.
In September (19th) I tried to escape with 7 other chaps 5 got away. Our boat sank about 5-6 mls off Pontac. Peter Curwood & "Bello" La Cloche, my companions, swam to the shore with me."
We were tried by Court Martial; We got 12 months each. We have been here 5 months now and tonight Feb 6th I am going to escape again. Well George I hope we meet again in better times, Good luck & goodbye.

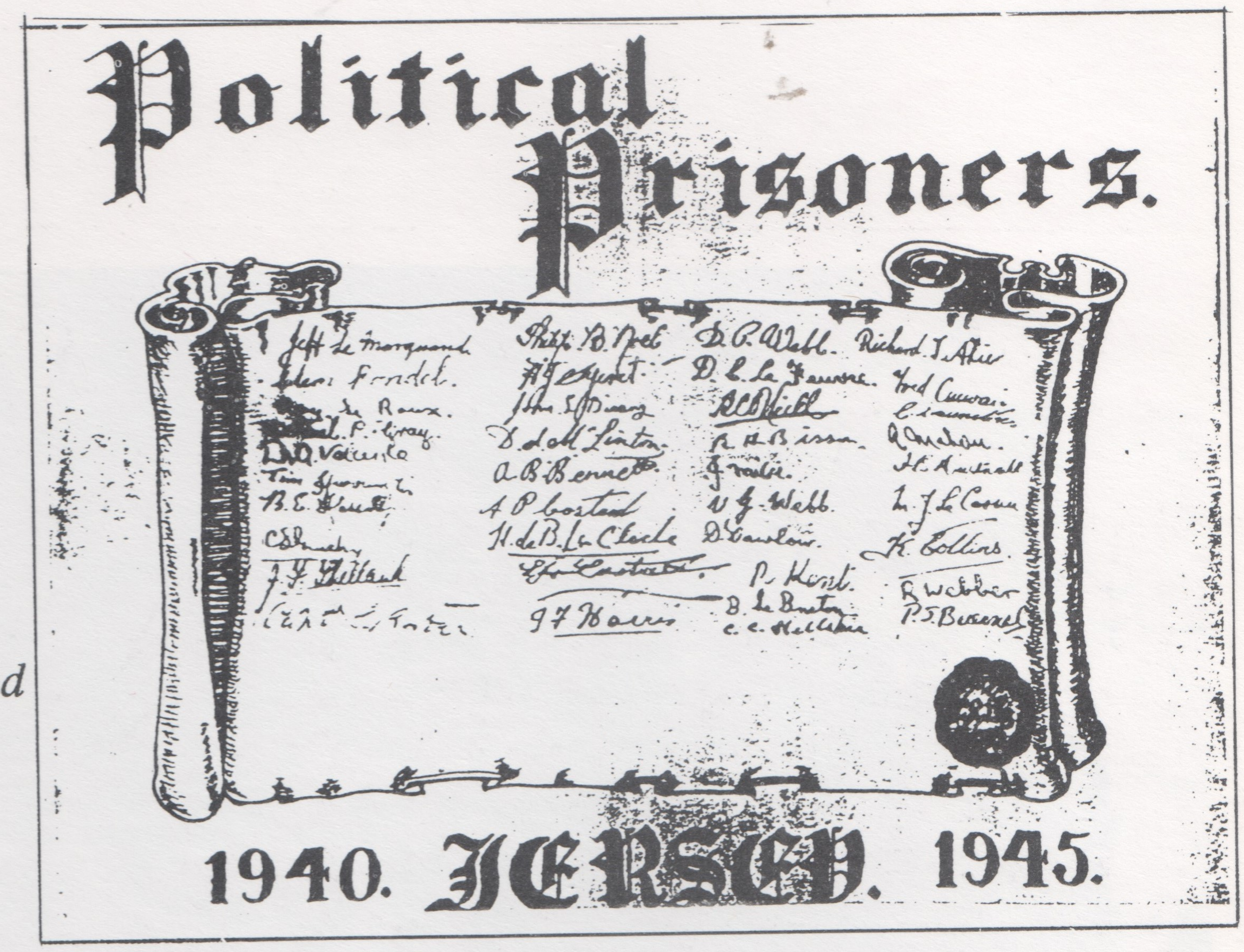
Yours till Hell freezes
Frank

"GOD SAVE THE KING'

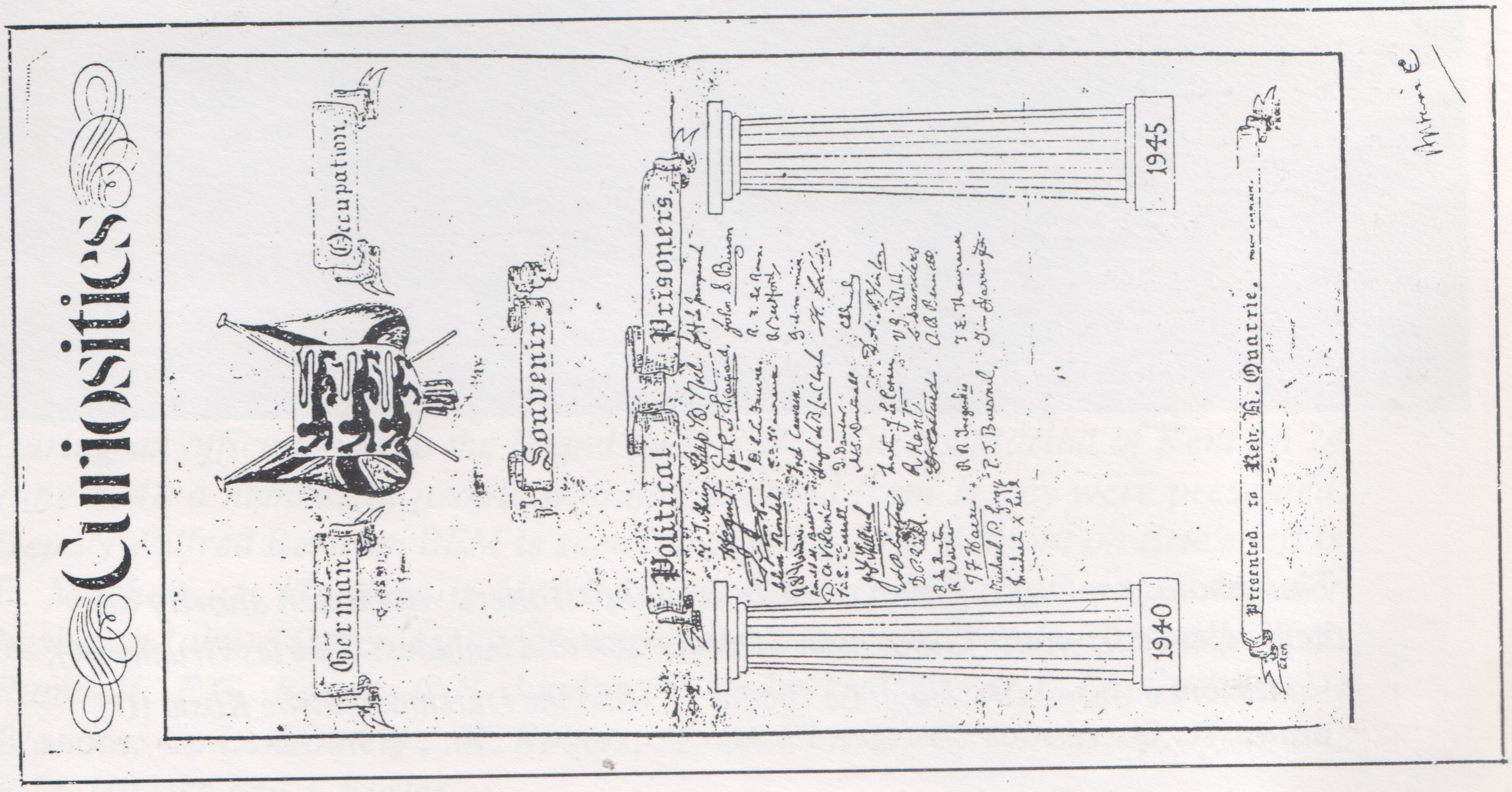
Feb 6th 1945
H.M. Prison
Jersey

During his imprisonment, George Le Marquand kept a secret diary which has only rece come to light. The entry above was made by Frank Killer on 6/2/45, the day Killer m his successful escape from prison in the company of Peter Curwood and George Withy

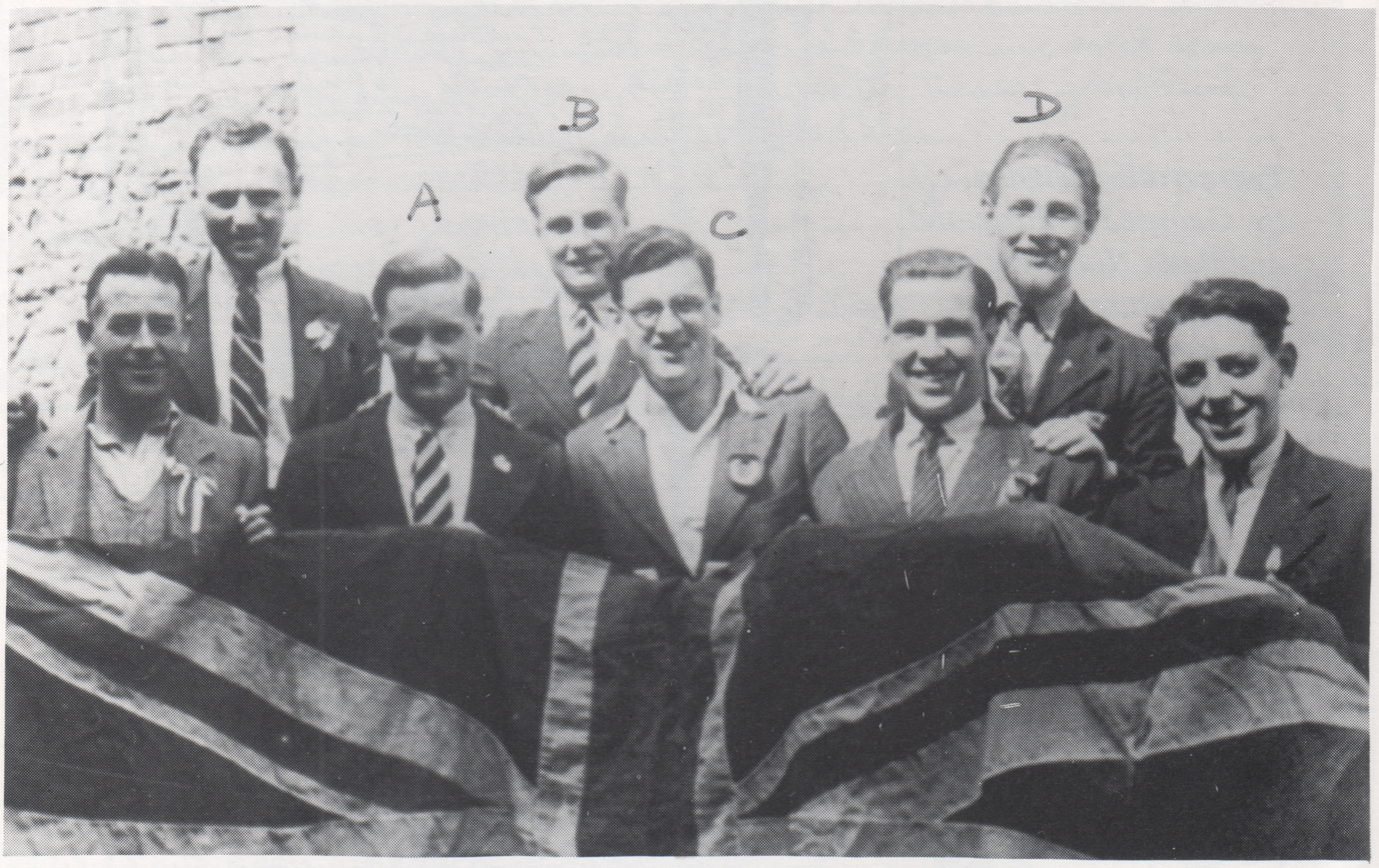
Appendix C


Political Prisoners.
1940. JERSEY. 1945.

Two scrolls designed by George Le Marquand and Peter Noel bearing the signatures of a number of 'political' prisoners


Curiosities
German Occupation
Souvenir
Political Prisoners
1940
1945
Presented to Rev. R. Quartrie.

Appendix D



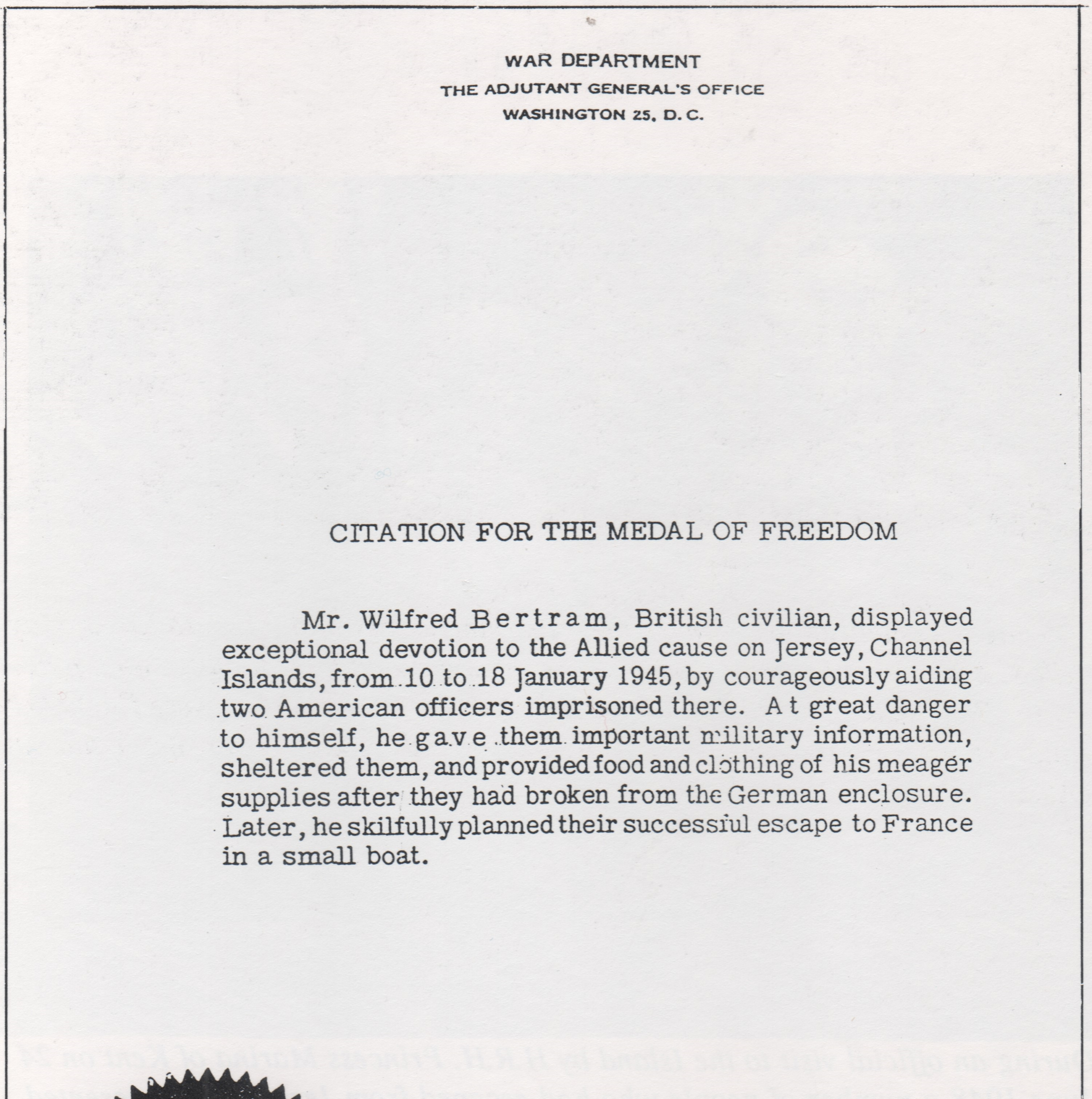
This photograph of a group of ex-political prisoners was taken shortly after their release from the Gloucester Street prison and includes: Charles Gruchy (A); Martin Le Cornu (B); Hugh Le Cloche (C) and the Dutchman Siebe Kosta (D)

ers was taken shortly after
ncludes: Charles Gruchy (A);
Dutchman Siebe Kosta (D)

Appendix E

During an official visit to the Island by H.R.H. Princess Marina of Kent on 24 June 1948 a number of people who had escaped from Jersey were presented. Deputy Wilfred Bertram BEM is seen introducing Eric Hamon; on Eric's left is B. Machon, on his right is Mrs Barbara Langley (née Hutchings) and her husband John. Other escapees were also presented: H.F. Costard; W.N. Rumball; F.G. Borny; C.H. Luxton; P.H. Le Gallais; G.J. Le Gallais; D. Blandin; G. Le Couteur; R. Robert; H. La Cloche; C. Bondis; O. Horman; R.M. Havard and J. Foster

Appendix F

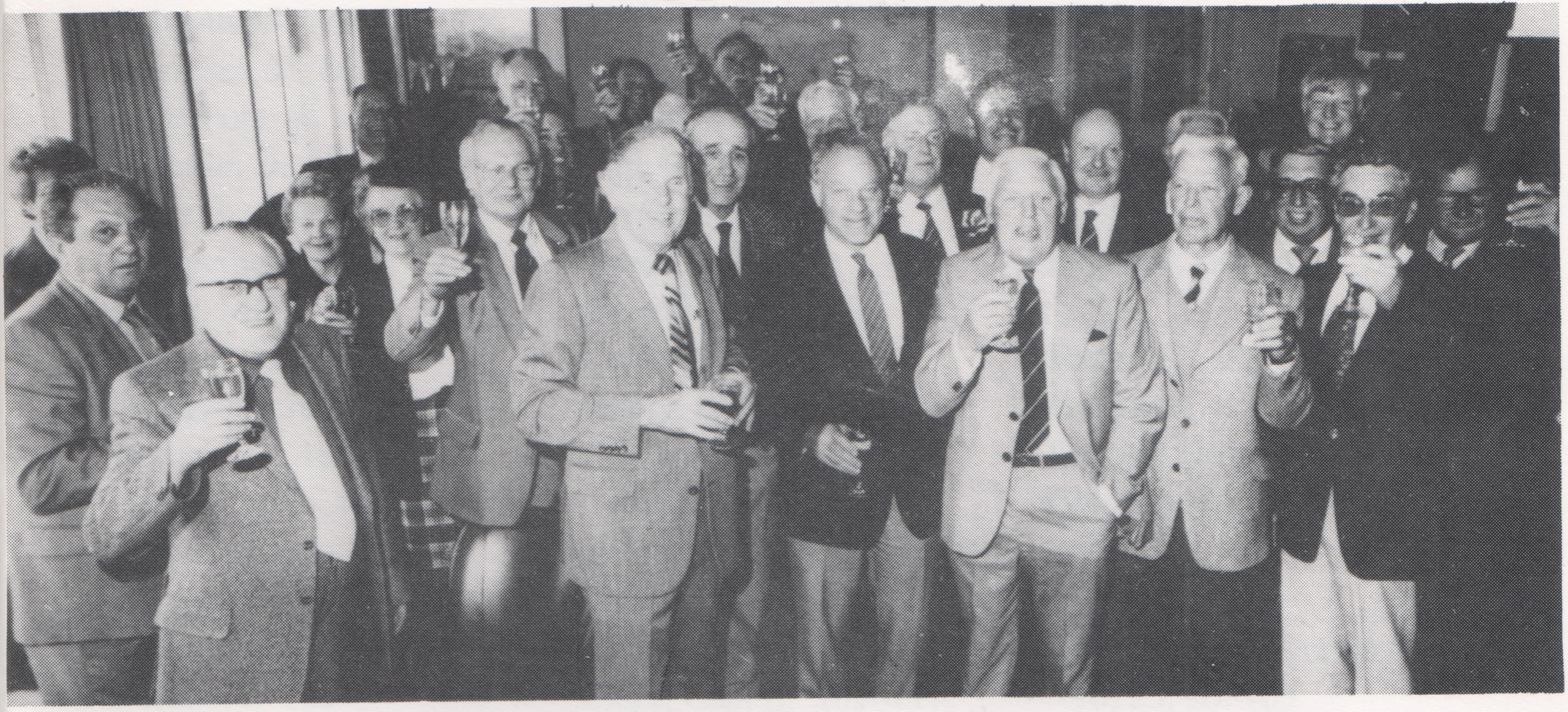


WAR DEPARTMENT
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

CITATION FOR THE MEDAL OF FREEDOM

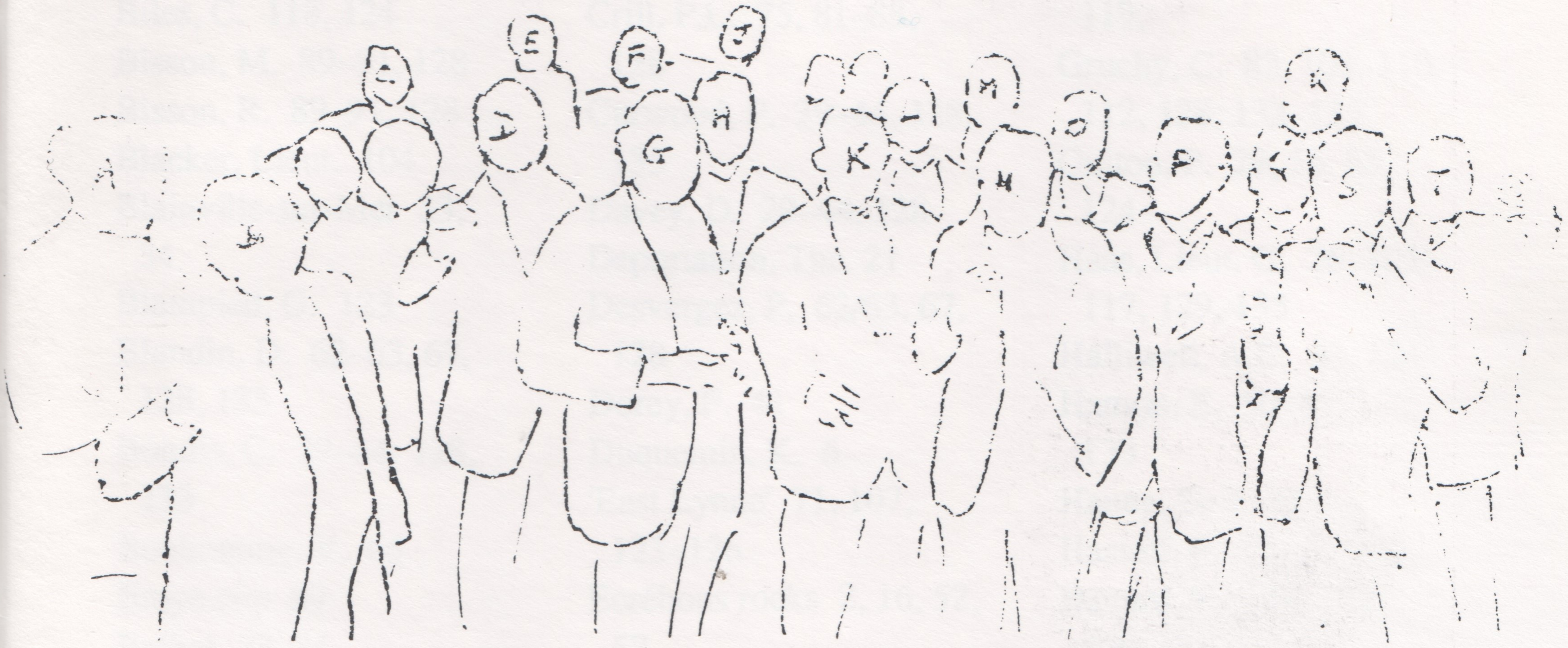
Mr. Wilfred Bertram, British civilian, displayed exceptional devotion to the Allied cause on Jersey, Channel Islands, from 10 to 18 January 1945, by courageously aiding two American officers imprisoned there. At great danger to himself, he gave them important military information, sheltered them, and provided food and clothing of his meager supplies after they had broken from the German enclosure. Later, he skilfully planned their successful escape to France in a small boat.

Appendix G



Reunion photograph in 1985

During the celebrations to mark the 40th anniversary of the Liberation in May 1985, a reunion of some 35 occupation escapees and their families took place at the Royal Channel Island Yacht Club. Among those present were Ed. Clark and George Haas from the U.S.A. and Frank Keiller from his home in Australia.



Key : *A Ken Jesty, B Basil Machon, C Roy Mourant, D Peter Noel, E Michael X. Neil, F George Le Marquand, G Ed. Clark, H Peter Curwood, J John Floyd, K George Haas, L Michael Price, M Paddy Smith, N Basil Le Brun, O George Le Couteur, P Francis Le Sueur, Q Donald Le Lievre, R Frank Keiller, S Roger Rouille, T Charles Gruchy*

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